

PlayStation®

Official Magazine - Australia

NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERCOVER

Street racing revolutionised, is this the best Need for Speed yet?

SKATE 2
Can Tony Hawk's keep up?

**FINAL
FANTASY
XIII**

Square Enix answers
all your questions

**HEAVY
RAIN**

The Origami Killer
makes a Splash!

**LITTLE
BIGIDEAS**

How LittleBigPlanet
redefines gaming!

**FIFA 09 VS
PRO EVO 2009**

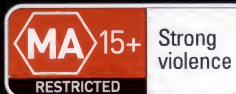
Which game tops the leaderboard?



BROTHERS ★ IN ARMS ★ ★ IN ARMS ★ HELL'S HIGHWAY™



PLAYSTATION 3



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PlayStation 2

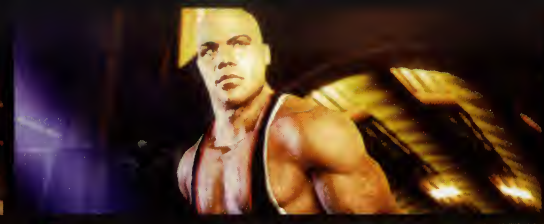
PLAYSTATION 3

Wii


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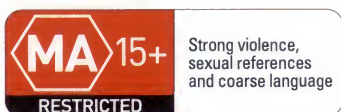
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Saints Row 2

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PLAYSTATION 3



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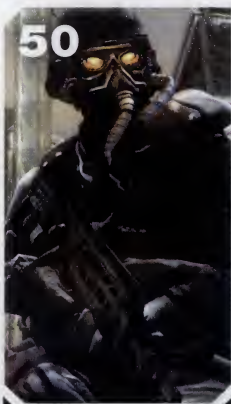
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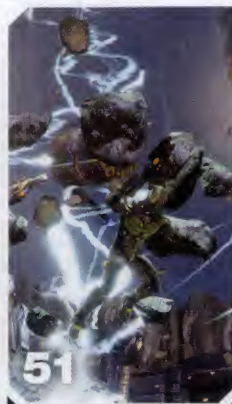
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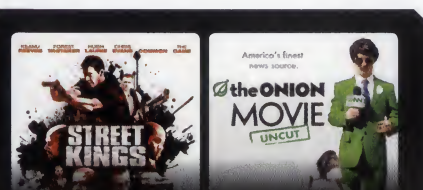
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"There has been an increased amount of swearing of late!"

We're feeling the need, the need for sleep! How many people out there are still spending their nights gaming only to wake up for work feeling crappy?

With the increase in game releases heading into the back end of the year, the OPS staff has been stretched to the max. If we aren't living out the rockstar lifestyle travelling the world (it's not as much fun as it sounds, honestly!), then we're dividing up reviews and claiming dibs on upcoming games. There has been an increased amount of swearing of late!

While the releases have been thin on the ground, the build-up as we race towards Christmas is stacked in Sony's favour. Firstly, we've just gotten our 'double the size, double the pleasure' PS3 with the release of the 80GB version. Then there is that little munchkin that is sure to delight any owner of a shiny black box of joy, Sackboy, who has been making so many appearances of that he's starting to look like Sony's new mascot. He'll blast-through all guns blazing in late October. Throw in games like *MotorStorm: Pacific Rift*, *Mirror's Edge*, *Dead Space*, *Guitar Hero World Tour* and *Resistance 2* and we foresee many sleepless nights before the end of the year.

Ness

**Vanessa Morgan
Editor**

PS3 online: sibernaut

"I think this is a friendly message, like "Hey, wanna play?" and yes I want to play. I really, really do." – *Dexter Morgan*

The team feels the need for...?

MARK SERRELS

I feel the need for a second TV in my apartment. I feel the need to *not* have to duke it out with *So You Think You Can Dance* for my precious gaming time. I also feel the need to gut and garrot my mortgage broker (long story).
Online: Serrels



PHILLIP JORGE

I feel the need for bloody Naruto to get out of the filler and back to the main story. I feel the need for Mark to stop farting in my face after eating copious amounts of homemade lentil soup. That scent – it's just so dense...
Online: PhilLipO



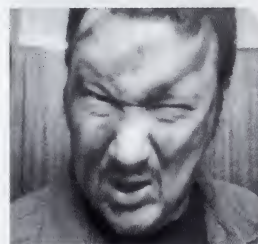
ANTHONY O'CONNOR

For the guy at the bottle-o to stop thinking I'm Kevin Smith. If that alcohol-dispensing arse chortles: "Snootchie Bootchies, Silent Bob!" again he'll find his next witticism muffled by my size 10.
Online: stoxxy242



DAVE KOZICKI

To serenade a hottie at a bar with my mates, perhaps play some shirtless homoerotic volleyball, be a renegade maverick pilot and maybe shoot down some MIGs with my wingman Iceman... it could be a great movie!
Online: ko-zee-ii



JAMES ELLIS

A wagon full of lithe gypsy tarts, please. The sort of vulgar women any man would give one of his love spuds to embrace. The sort of passio... wait, this wasn't supposed to be about games was it? Was it...? Oh.
Online: gtfaster49



DYLAN BURNS

Trophy support for ALL PS3 games – right now! Seriously, unlocking those things is more addictive than watching YouTube videos of people hurting themselves on trampolines. Well, maybe not quite, but I definitely feel a need to increase my PSN e-go.
Online: GameboffinAU



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Official Magazine - Australia

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Company in Australia and Netlink in
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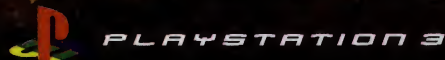
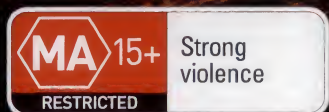
SHOUT OUTS: Japanese energy
drinks :: The letter 'C' :: Mark's
new digs :: RAW :: Black Box,
especially Dana :: Neko :: Agata ::
James thanks no one :: David Cage
:: SASUKE! :: We'll miss you JC

A promotional image for the video game Far Cry 2. It depicts a character in a military-style uniform with a rifle on their back, walking away from the viewer down a dirt path in a savanna environment. The path is littered with spent bullet casings. In the background, a military vehicle is partially visible, and the scene is set against a bright, hazy sunset or sunrise. The title 'FAR CRY 2' is prominently displayed in the center in a stylized, metallic font.

FAR CRY 2

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Gaming's latest and greatest...

BUZZ

Fallout 3 finally gets a rating, Guitar Hero World Tour tracklist revealed, Naughty Dog unleash the PS3's potential, and more...

FALLOUT 3 GETS THROUGH!

Bethesda's baby finally gets an OFLC rating...

It's been a long time coming, but finally, after months of back and forth, *Fallout 3* has now received a rating from the OFLC. Huzzah!

Neither the OFLC or Red Ant (the distributors of *Fallout 3*) were willing to spill the beans with regards to the conditions of the rating, but considering our prior knowledge that a new, re-edited version of *Fallout 3* was being resubmitted to the OFLC, it's pretty safe to say that the problems the OFLC previously had (use of intravenously injected drugs, such as morphine) have been eradicated.

But what does that mean

for the game itself? It's difficult to say. It could be a decent amount of time before we get a real, tangible idea regarding what specific changes have been made and why. The official OFLC report states that drugs in *Fallout 3* (which caused the initial issue) have now been given fictional names (such as Buff, Rad-X and Ultrajet... what the hell!) but what else has been removed to ensure a rating?

We hope, and remain confident, that the core experience of *Fallout 3* will remain in the Australian version. Here's hoping we won't have to go through this rigmarole again in the future.

THE ISSUE

While it seems strange that *Fallout 3* was denied classification in the first place (the violence is relatively tame) the problem was with the OFLC code itself. Said code is particularly stringent with regards to drugs and, in particular, using drugs to get an edge without consequence. So while it may seem strange to deny a rating on the basis that morphine is used in the game – according to the code, it was enough to cause problems with classification...



ON THE FORUMS...

Fallout 3 will get released in Australia after all!

Garnet 23
Game's officially been classified.
:)

Bagmup
Thank God, I suppose, even if it has been 'Disneyised' (not a real word)

Joah
Being Classified means its now legal to import it :D

Bagmup
I find your idea very interesting...

CrazyGamer08
Import it? From where? The Land of the Long White Cloud? NZ wins again...

WORLD TOUR TRACKLIST!

'Eye of the Tiger' baby!

Alright. So last month we had a gander at the all-conquering *Rock Band* track list, so now we reckon it's time to cast an eager eye upon the *Guitar Hero World Tour* songs. Sadly, we haven't been given a comprehensive list (a whole bunch of tracks remain unannounced) but we have been given a fairly extensive number of songs to announce.

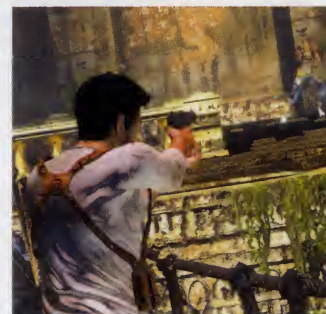
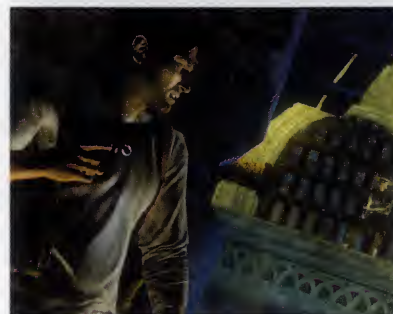
With that said – let's get this show on the road...

- Van Halen – Hot for Teacher
- Sublime – Santeria
- Linkin Park – What I've Done
- The Eagles – Hotel California
- Billy Idol – Rebel Yell
- Foo Fighters – Everlong
- Blink 182 – Dammit
- Paramore – Misery Business
- The Doors – Love me Two Times
- Jimi Hendrix – Purple Haze Live
- Jimi Hendrix – Wind Cries Mary
- Airbourne – Too Much Too Young
- At the Drive-in – One Armed Scissor
- Bob Seger – Hollywood Nights
- BRMC – Weapon of Choice
- Dino Jr. – Feel the Pain
- Lost Prophets – Rooftops
- Silversun Pickups – Lazy Eye
- Survivor – Eye of the Tiger
- The Enemy – Aggro
- 311 – Beautiful Disaster
- Blondie – One Way or Another
- Fleetwood Mac – Go Your Own Way
- Korn – Freak on a Leash

- No Doubt – Spiderwebs
- Pat Benatar – Heartbreaker
- REM – The One I Love
- The Cult – Love Removal Machine
- Willie Nelson – On the Road Again
- Beastie Boys – No Sleep Till Brooklyn
- Bon Jovi – Livin' On a Prayer
- CCR – Up Around the Bend
- Interpol – Obstacle1
- Modest Mouse – Float On
- Negramaro – Nuvole
- Nirvana – About a Girl
- Oasis – Some Might Say
- The Guess Who – American Woman
- BLS – Stillborn
- Bullet for my Valentine – Scream Aim Fire
- Lacuna Coil – Our Truth
- Metallica – Trapped Under Ice
- Motorhead – Overkill
- Ozzy Osbourne – Crazy Train
- Ozzy Osbourne – Mr. Crowley
- System of a Down – BYOB
- Anouk – Good God
- Beatsteaks – Hail to the Freaks
- Coldplay – Shiver
- Hush Puppies – You're Gonna Say Yeah
- Kent – Vinternoll 2
- Lenny Kravitz – Are You Gonna Go My Way
- Mars Volta – L'Vai L'Viaquez
- Radio Futura – Escuela De Calor
- Steve Miller – The Joker
- Tokio Hotel – Monsoon
- Trust – Anti-social
- Wings – Band on the Run



Yeah you better run, erm... yellow guy



NAUGHTY DOG LEARNS NEW TRICKS

The PS3's untapped potential...

Turns out you actually can teach an old dog new tricks – especially if said dog is Naughty Dog, the development team behind *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*, arguably the greatest looking game on console to date.

Well, amazingly enough, despite the fact that *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* represents the technical pinnacle of PS3 development thus far, Richard Lemarchand, lead game designer at Naughty Dog, claims that we haven't seen nothing yet. Apparently the original *Uncharted* only used 30-40% of the PS3s potential. Well, slap my thigh and call me Roger.

That bodes well – that bodes very well – particularly for the inevitable

Uncharted sequel (which we're 200% Naughty Dog are well into the development of). If *Uncharted* represented only 30% of the PS3s potential, then consider our pants positively soaked in anticipation of what the team can potentially deliver with the second game.

And just to salivate your interest further, here's another interesting piece of news – the Naughty Dog team and Sony Santa Monica, currently working on *God of War 3*, work roughly a block from each other, and they've been sharing tips on how to maximize the performance of the PS3.

Look forward to having your mind blown by both titles.



Seriously... this guy's limbs are weird

WHAT'S HOT AND WHAT'S NOT...

LittleBigPlanet

So close we can taste it... weird.

PixelJunk Eden

Stop it, you damn sexy game...

Killzone 2

Tweak that level design and KABLAMMO!

Force Unleashed

Solid – but should have been better?

Fracture

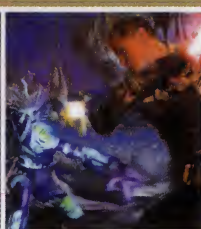
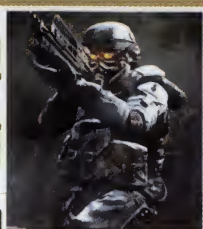
Potential is there – but, needs balancing?

Yakuza 2

Hmm – kinda cool, kinda crap...

Hellboy

Give us a game deserving of the fans



HOT!

NOT!

INFO NUDGE

Prodding you in the ribs with all the latest newsbites...



BRAID

While we wouldn't switch our beloved PSN content for anything on God's glorious green earth (*Pixel Junk* games, baby!), we admit to being a little bit jealous of Xbox LIVE's recent effort *Braid*. The good news, however, is that the insane, time-bending antics of *Braid* will possibly hit the PSN – as soon as the timed exclusivity deal runs out. Here's hoping.



MONSTER MASH

As anyone who has ever tried to play *Pixel Junk Monsters* will testify – the game is bloody difficult. Dylan Cuthbert, head of Q Games (the genius dudes behind the *Pixel Junk* games) has decided he wants to release some new difficulty levels for *PJM*, both an easier difficulty level, and a more difficult one. Oh, and also – *Pixel Junk Eden* will be getting some all-new modes.



GAY TV

As Play TV slowly lumbers towards release, a couple of choice details have come to our attention that are sadly, how can we put this, a little on the disappointing side. First off the content recorded on the PS3 hard drive via Play TV will now be non-transferable – you can only watch it via your PS3, or a PSP if you have one. Secondly, for now the PS3 won't be able to record HD content from your television, although this may be rectified in a later update.



ABC

While we love the new look PlayStation Store, we have been having a couple of issues – mainly to do with the categorisation of games, movies, etc, into genre. With some of the more off the wall PSN games in particular, we have no idea how such games might be categorised. Well thank the good Lord Sony have seen sense, and are currently working towards alphabetising the games and movie listings on the PSN. The whole thing should have been remedied by the time you read this.

I'M A SURVIVOR

I ain't gon give up...

In an attempt to distinguish itself from the 360 version of 2007, 2K Games have announced a 'Survivor' mode for their all-new upcoming PS3 version of *BioShock*.

While at first we had hoped for a whole new game element, ala the 'Mercenaries' mode in *Resident Evil 4*, the reality is a little more anti-climatic. The Survivor mode has turned out to be, essentially, just a higher difficulty level for *BioShock*, where ammunition is more scarce, and the enemies are tougher.

So at this stage, with the trophies being the same as the 360 Achievements, and the only real addition to gameplay being an increased difficulty level, we can't help but feel a bit jibbed being asked to pay full price for what's essentially a basic port of a year old game. Here's hoping that 2K games has something else up its sleeve for *BioShock*.



STOLEN PS3 MAGICALLY FOUND

Via the wonder of the internet...

Imagine you had your PS3 stolen. That would suck pretty hard, wouldn't it? How about if you found out your PS3, that you just purchased second-hand that day, was actually stolen, and you had to return it, with absolutely no refund. That's what happened to Dustin Waller – through the magic of the Internet.

Because, since Mr Waller was obviously, obviously unaware of the fact the PS3 his girlfriend recently bought was actually stolen, he turned it on without a care. As soon as the PS3 logged on to the internet, the auto login began, and those clever little buggers at the police station were able to track and find the PS3 via Dustin Waller's IP address.

Despite being completely innocent, Dustin was robbed of his gift. As compensation, however, the store he purchased the PS3 from gave him a gift in return – an Xbox 360. Apparently he was a little disappointed as "the Xbox isn't nearly as expensive or sophisticated as the PlayStation".

WHAT'S NEXT FOR TEAM ICO?

Get a move on...

As anyone smart, or lucky enough, to have played either of Team ICO's PS2 masterpieces *Ico* or *Shadow of the Colossus* will no doubt know, the team's latest project is currently shrouded in mystery, despite pressure from fans worldwide to reveal the project.

So what gives? Well apparently Fumito Ueda, legendary lead designer behind both of Team ICO's titles is in absolutely no rush to reveal anything regarding their PS3 project at this stage.

Speaking to UK magazine *Games TM*, Ueda claimed that as of right now "production has not reached the critical stage" and that at the moment he doesn't feel any pressure to release any footage of the game. Boo! All he would reveal at this stage was that he was "working on a PS3 title". Thanks for stating the obvious, then you big dummy... thanks for nothing.

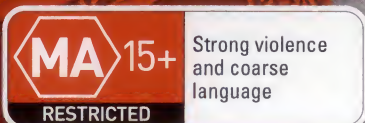
The time spent on the game so far hasn't been lost on new Sony Worldwide President Shuhei Yoshida, who calls them the "Olympic team" (since they only get a game out every four years). But Yoshida is one of the few lucky enough to have seen the game, and claims that, even at this stage, it's "really, really good".

We believe you Mr Worldwide President. We believe you.



Yakuza 2

OUT 25.9.08



PlayStation 2

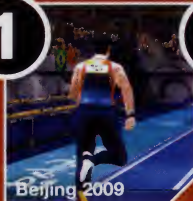


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TOP 10 GAMES CHART

1



Beijing 2009

2



GTA IV

3



Soulcalibur IV

Rank	Title	Category	Distributor
4	Madden NFL 2009	Sports	EA
5	Metal Gear Solid 4	Action	Atari
6	Buzz! Quiz TV	Party	Sony
7	Gran Turismo 5: Prologue	Driving	Sony
8	Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	Party	Activision
9	Battlefield: Bad Company	Shooter	EA
10	Race Driver: GRID	Racing	Atari

COMING SOON



Format	Title	Category	Distributor
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SEPTEMBER

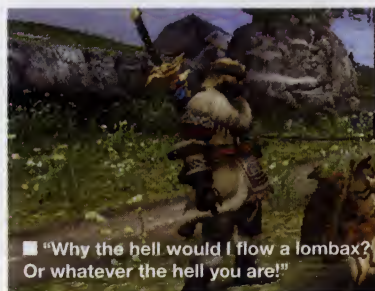
PS3	Destroy All Humans: Path of the Furon	Action	THQ
PS3	SOCOM: Confrontation	Shooter	Sony
PS3	TNA IMPACT	Fighting	Red Ant
PS3	Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	Action	Activision
PS3	Rise of the Argonauts	RPG	Atari

OCTOBER

PS3	Alone in the Dark	Action	Atari
PS3	Motorstorm: Pacific Rift	Driving	Sony
PS3	LittleBigPlanet	Platformer	Sony
PS3	Saints Row 2	Action	THQ
PS3	Pure	Driving	Funtastic
PS3	BioShock	Shooter	2K
PS3	Midnight Club Los Angeles	Driving	Rockstar
PS3	Dead Space	Action	EA
PS3	Fallout 3	RPG	Red Ant
PS3	Fracture	Shooter	Activision

NOVEMBER

PS3	Call of Duty: World at War	Action	Activision
PS3	Pro Evolution Soccer 2009	Sports	Atari
PS3	Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe	Fighter	Red Ant



■ "Why the hell would I flow a lombax? Or whatever the hell you are!"

OUR MAN IN JAPAN

Introducing...



Hajimemashite!

My name's Jonti.

I'm a games journalist based in Japan, near Kyoto, which is in fact Nintendo Town – Sony's headquarters are up in Tokyo, about

two hours away by shinkansen (bullet train). Of course Sony and the PlayStation formats are popular nationwide, but there's definitely a bit of local pride for Nintendo's achievements. Anyway, I'm not here to talk about *Pokémon*, so let's move on shall we.

Last week *Phantasy Star Portable* blasted to the top of the all-formats sales chart here with first week sales of almost 350,000 copies, again proving the popularity of the PSP – currently Japan's number one games machine. The PSP recently budgeted past

the landmark of 10 million consoles sold, pushed on by team-based RPGs on the format (see *Monster Hunter*'s multi-million-selling successes). Until the turn of 2008, Japan was more enamoured with Nintendo's Wii and DS machines, but the PSP has been outselling all of its competitors this year. Quite a comeback.

The PS3, meanwhile, is stuck at a slow but consistent rate of performance just a notch up from the PS2, which will be ten years old in Japan next March. Both consoles shift around 10,000 units every week, but the PS3 really needs to push on if it's going to achieve anything like the phenomenal success that the PS2 has managed during its lifetime. *Afrika* could help.

Sony Japan's virtual safari tourism game (perhaps that should be 'non-game') is due here by the end of August and it's attracting great interest from all sorts of people. Titles like this could help Sony steal some of Nintendo's 'light user' audience.



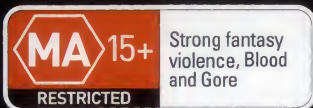
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BEAUTY & THE BEASTS



PLAYSTATION 3



XBOX 360 LIVE

SECRET LEVEL

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What's next for our favourite games?

WHERE TO NOW?

Tom Clancy actually owns the entire east coast of the United States, some rubbish parts of Canada and most of Brisbane. With all that Real estate, all that influence and a laundry list of future game titles coming out shortly that includes *Tom Clancy's EndWar* and *HAWX*, we take a look and see what the big guy will be slapping his name on next.



THE GAME?	EXPLAIN YOURSELF..	THE STORY	HOW WILL IT PLAY?	PROBABILITY
 <p>TOM CLANCY'S THE HUNT FOR YOUNGER HEINEY</p>	<p>Old grizzly bear Clancy has enough dough to hire an ass-wiping mermaid. A guy like that is not going to stand being shackled up with a boiler who has a face like a catcher's glove. If ever there was a guy who understood hunting poontang, Clancy is the man.</p>	<p>Players star as a retired CIA spy who has successfully embezzled millions from America's enemies over the years. After offloading all children and responsibility to an estranged wife, players must splurge their dough on hot nightclubs in their attempt to attract flange.</p>	<p>Like <i>Civilization</i>, players progressively buy up more heiny-focused real estate, but during climactic periods where a lady was found, the game would shift down to a Hot Coffee-esque adventure.</p>	<p>Does it matter? What matters is that this game should come out. Can we get an amen to that? Hello? Anyone?</p>
 <p>TOM CLANCY'S TALIBAN GAMES</p>	<p>We always see one side of the story. The Taliban are people too. It's time to lighten up and have fun with these huggable bearded teddy bears.</p>	<p>Players star as a CIA spy who pastes a wig of donkey hair on his chin and goes undercover in the Taliban. While there, he realises these thugs – while being heinously sinister – also like to partake in the odd game of Bocce and Twister.</p>	<p>A party game to rival <i>Mario Party</i>, it'll be broken down into a series of mini games for up to eight players that include, Bomb and Spoon races, Pass the Ticking Parcel, Beard Sculpting, and the <i>Singstar</i>-esque Suicide Chants.</p>	<p>Aside from the <i>Singstar</i> and <i>Buzz</i> titles, there aren't nearly enough party games on the PS3 – so why not? It's a potential goldmine.</p>
 <p>TOM CLANCY'S LEISURE SUIT SAILOR</p>	<p>Precision and discipline are often associated with the military when it comes to Clancy games. Why not broaden the definition to cover other aspects of life as a solider – like punctuated spouts of debauchery, brawling and boozing?</p>	<p>Players star as a CIA spy who goes undercover in the navy. While there he must gain the trust of his mates in tight white pants by engaging in sweaty homoerotic games of curling and by trying to lay as much pipe as possible in every port they visit.</p>	<p>Like the old-school adventure games <i>Monkey Island</i>, <i>Grim Fandango</i> and even the <i>Leisure Suit Larry</i> series. We've all been waiting for this style of game to be resurrected.</p>	<p>If the upcoming Larry game can shift more units than <i>Magna Cum Laude</i>, which means anything above zero, this title will still have no chance of ever being uttered into existence. Upsetting.</p>
 <p>TOM CLANCY'S PGA STRIKE</p>	<p>You can't tell us that Tom Clancy is out on the battlefields of the modern world – the only bunker he's been in is the one holding his shanked golf ball hostage next to a pond packed with flamingos. It's time the reality of Clancy's life merged with his games.</p>	<p>Players star as a CIA spy who spends a day putting balls around a green trimmed with more care than a Playmate's privates. All of a sudden the golf course is overcome by tree planting terrorists. Armed with a bag of golf clubs and his golfing buddies, the player must liberate all 18 holes.</p>	<p>Part golf sim, part <i>Rainbow Six Vegas</i>. Using first-person squad commands players must dispatch enemies on each hole before that hole can be golfed on.</p>	<p>Gamers love golf. Gamers love first-person shooters. It's like apple and rhubarb, people! Start writing in to Ubisoft and we'll probably see it happen. Possibly. Maybe. Or not.</p>
 <p>TOM CLANCY'S GIRLS WITH GUNS</p>	<p>With more women than ever starting to pick up the controller, now is the time for the Clancy series to throw its arms open to women who love to watch hotter members of their sex cavort around in bikinis with assault rifles.</p>	<p>Players star as a hot CIA spy forced to uncover a gun smuggling racket by getting umpteen amounts of plastic surgery and becoming a GIRL WITH A GUN.</p>	<p>Combine the third-person destruction of <i>Mercenaries 2</i> with the jigging bra-busting of any game ever made by Tecmo and you'll be right on the money. There'd also have to be some mud wrestling mini games. Of course.</p>	<p>A fantasy bunch of babes set amidst Tom Clancy's precise perspective of combat would be something new. It'll happen. Oh, yes.</p>



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Official Nintendo magazine

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UNTRACEABLE

Untraceable is the story of Jennifer Marsh, a secret agent who gets caught up in a very personal and deadly game with a serial killer. The story centres on a gruesome website which streams the murder of innocents live on the internet. Likely to make you squirm and have you on the edge of your seat, *Untraceable* is a thriller not to be missed.

Thanks to the release of *Untraceable* on DVD we're giving away this massive prize including:

- Untraceable on DVD
- An NEC 42" Plasma with Integration HD tuner
- An NEC Slim Line Progressive Scan DVD Player
- A Nokia N81 Mobile phone
- An ASUS Eee Box

NEC has provided us with the top of the range NEC 42" Plasma, which features a built in digital HD tuner and superb resolution delivering a truly high quality picture. Hooking that up to your NEC

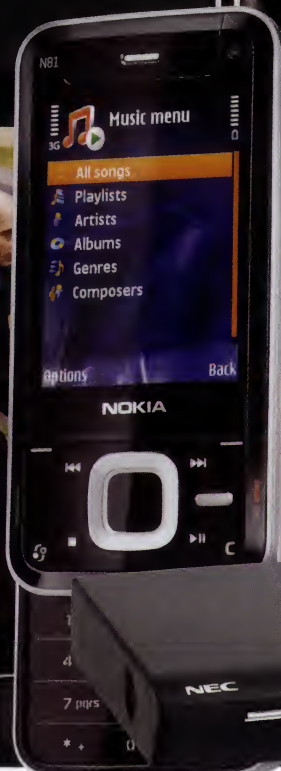
Slim Line Progressive Scan DVD Player, a slim and stylish DVD Player that offers 3D Surround Sound Dolby Digital Multi-Format Playback Options to offer you the best viewing experience.

Crazy John's, your mobile experts, have also provided a Nokia N81. Packed with features including dedicated media keys for quick and easy access to music and video, a 3.5 mm headphone connector, a 2.4" display, and 8 GB of storage space. For all your mobile phone needs visit www.crazyjohns.com.au

Topping off your entertainment package is the Eee Box, this slim and sleek nettop allows you to make it your own personal jukebox streaming music as well as pictures and video from a media centre or home server, or you could become a chatterbox and shoot the breeze with friends via VoIP.

To win, tell us in 25 words or less, why you'd be the perfect accomplice for a cyber criminal?

Code word: Trace



NEC **ASUS** **CRAZY JOHN'S** **EeeBox** **UNIVERSAL**
Rock Solid · Heart Touching YOUR MOBILE EXPERTS



PLAYSTATION 3

LEGENDARY



M

Action
ViolenceMECOCK
MEDIA GROUPDEAD SET
LEGEND

Why would you want to live in New York City? The place can't catch a break these days. Evidence? See *Legendary*, which sees Pandora's Box opened on the city, releasing all kinds of beasts. Your job is to stop the invasion and save the world.

To take part in the fight answer the below question, enter

the code and you could end up with one of ten copies of this *Legendary* game on PS3.

To win, tell us in 25 words or less, which city would you like to see destroyed and why?

Code word: Heroes



WIN!

WHERE'S
THE TUX?

Silent Hill is having a *Homecoming*, which will inevitably bring out all the gory androgynous freaks we've come to expect.

As war veteran Alex Shepard you'll return home from a tour of duty to find your father and brother missing and his mother catatonic. Obviously there is only one place to go from here: *Silent Hill*.

We have 10 PS3 copies up

for grabs; to enter just follow the simple instructions on page 20.

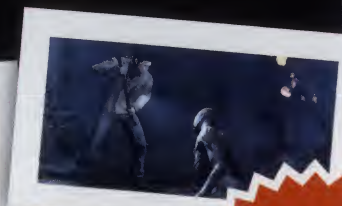
To win, tell us in 25 words or less, what film do you rate as the goriest ever and why?

Code word: Guard



KONAMI

PLAYSTATION 3

SILENT HILL
HOME COMING

WIN!

MA 15+
RESTRICTEDStrong
Horror Violence

RISE OF THE ARGONAUTS

PLAYSTATION 3



GETTING A RISE

While we're not sure we could take a King called Jason (call him Henry or something) we are hanging for *Rise of the Argonauts* so we can pick up ye olde mighty sword and lop off a few heads.

To join the King of Lolcus' quest you need to follow the instructions on page 20,

throw on a thinking cap and you could be one of ten OPS readers to partake in his heroic feats.

To win, tell us in 25 words or less, which is the greatest of the Greek gods and why?

Code word: Argo

WIN!



EXTREME INVADERS

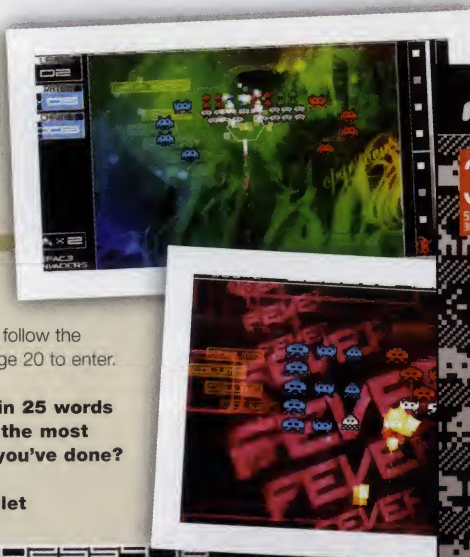
Celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2008, *Space Invaders* is back in extreme form. Brought to you by those crazy people at Square Enix, the game comes without a bonus emo wig, but will fill your day with hours of frustration as you try to crash through level three.

We have 20 copies of

Space Invaders Extreme on PSP to giveaway – just follow the instructions on page 20 to enter.

To win, tell us in 25 words or less, what's the most extreme thing you've done?

Code word: bullet



WIN!



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John Woo
吳宇森



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LETTERS



LETTER OF THE MONTH

WAR IS... AWESOME?

To use the old chestnut, I'm a long-time reader, first-time writer. I've been buying your mag since way back in 1998 and it's still the best around, as far as I'm concerned. This piece is more of an open letter for any game developer out there looking for a new direction. World War I: it was huge, it was horrific, it was a muddy, bloody nightmare – so why are there no games set during it? The market is currently full of World War II FPS games, but with immense respect and gratitude to those who served in the Second World War, WWI made it look like a little-lunch bitch fight. The sheer scale and ferocity of the fighting in WWI would, I think, make for some extremely intense and gripping gaming. Imagine this: you're a young ANZAC digger, struggling up the beach at Gallipoli. You're desperately trying to move up the almost sheer cliff face against entrenched Turkish mortar and machine gun positions, all while the opening credits are flashing on the

screen. Or you could be a part of a light horse charge as they try to storm Turkish trenches in a vehicle section. The story could shift to different fronts too; imagine a level set on the Western Front in the Somme as you try to scrape metre by bloody metre back from the Germans while avoiding gas attacks and biplane strafing. I'm sorry, but why hasn't this game been made yet? So any developers reading this letter should really consider exploring this strangely forgotten area.

Dominic Zietsch, via email.

Definitely – we couldn't agree more here. World War II games have served us well, but we can't think of any game (outside of the surreal The Darkness WWI section) that focuses on this war. Perhaps it's the repetitive nature of the conflict, or maybe the lack of variety in location, but we're sure there are plenty of memorable battles that could be transformed into solid video game gold.



WINNER!

Ooh! Letter of the month wins a copy of *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed*!



■ We don't know how to install a new hard drive into the PS3, but apparently it's as easy as Paul's sister (remember that guy?)

LOVE HURTS

Now don't get me wrong, I love Sony but... there is one thing I am a bit skeptical about – Sony is releasing a new 80GB PS3. Don't get me wrong, it sounds great, but shouldn't it be the other way around? A premium, limited edition 80GB PS3 should have been released first. Now all the consumers who have waited for an unimaginable amount of time get the better product, while true fans, who purchased in the beginning, get the inferior product. Now, like you guys, I would've definitely preferred an 80GB over the 60GB version, but we've missed our chance, well at least I have – there's no way my dear mother is going to chip in another cash load for a product I already have. Anyway, maybe I should look on the bright side, at least I have one of those damn things, and with all the great games coming out maybe I should stop my whinging before I get a smacked bottom.

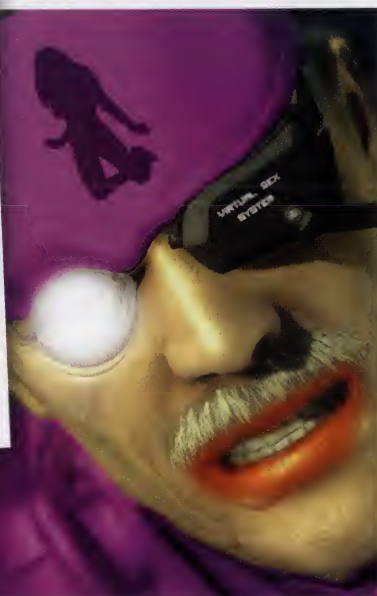
Seamus Townsend, via email

Sadly Seamus, it's the nature of the technology beast. I spent \$600 bucks on an MP3 player the size of Lithuania back in 2003, plus I'm stuck with ye olde 20GB PS3 imported from the US

of A. Technology advances constantly, and eventually absolutely everything you buy will either be superseded or drop in price. In addition, the PS3 makes it relatively easy to install new hard drives – and with storage space selling at an all time low, you could easily install a 250GB hard drive for less than a hundred bucks.

GIRL TROUBLE

I'm writing this letter in response to Brad's girlfriend banning him from playing his PS3 (letters section, issue 18). Ask yourself this question: is she the right girl for you? If you were my boyfriend I would never ban you from your PS3. Shame, shame on her – I would play with you. Although I am not necessarily a gamer as such, I do love playing games, it's fun, relaxing and quite challenging. I loved playing games with my ex – I would throw the odd occasional comment like "what are you buying? What are you selling?" when he was playing *Resident Evil 4*. Gaming was one of his passions, and I enjoyed sharing that with him. I personally don't understand girls that don't get guys into games or that don't want to play with their boyfriend. Brad, wouldn't it be fun if your girlfriend could watch you or join in all the fun? Because after all that's what it's all about. There are a lot of games that she could get her teeth stuck into. My next boyfriend has to be



■ Snake... has changed...



■ "For the last time, NO! I don't want to play with your 'woody'..."

into games. Hint to her that you would like her to join the fun. It could be kind of sexy.
Cheryl, Victoria

Cheryl... are you real? Are you an angel? Have we died and gone to heaven? Guys, this girl is single - she's looking for a guy who's into games? That's US, all of us. Well Cheryl, you've come to the right place if you're into guys who like games. We don't know if we'll be able to deal with the massive rush of mail we're going to get asking for your contact details...

A LOVER NOT A FIGHTER

First of all, I love the magazine, the informative, in-depth reviews and, of course, the hilarious captions. Well, now

that the flattering is done, I'll begin. I'm 15-years-old and, like every 15-year-old, I play videogames. I own a PS3 (please hold your applause) and even though I'm a PlayStation lover (well, not *literally* a PlayStation lover) I think all consoles have their good and bad points, and instead of arguing and complaining why don't we just enjoy what they have to offer. A lot of gamers nowadays have forgotten the true happiness and meaning of what games are really about. Videogames have carried us through some tough times, taken us away from reality and amazed us in many different ways. Now with the next-gen war between PS3 and Xbox 360, many people have been blinded by what video games really are. Why are people arguing about who has the better console? We

both have it good. We should be happy that next-generation graphics have made videogames a whole lot better. The next-gen war is conducted by 40-year-old unemployed fanboys who live with their parents and have nothing better to do with their lives other than argue stupidly about whose console is better. **Lame.**

Aaron, via email

We feel like we're beating a dead horse here, but gamers should learn to respect each others consoles of choice. Each has a solid amount of awesome exclusive titles, and both have a multitude of incredible cross platform games - why not spend time playing those incredible games? We've never had it so good people - enjoy it while you can.

CUTTINGS

Delicious bite-sized letter morsels that are easy to swallow

RUMBLE

Do you know if there is going to be a rumble patch for games like *Call of Duty 4* and *Rainbow Six Vegas*?

Jeremy, via email

Never say never, but at this stage there are no plans to patch rumble for either of these games. Gutted.

CRY ME A RIVER

I have a feeling that *COD: World at War* will stink and that I'm gonna cry in disappointment when it comes out.

Jaradth, via email

Our honest opinion? World at War probably won't be the all-conquering behemoth that COD4 was, but it certainly won't be a bad game by any manner of means.

BANNED

Why do all of the good games get banned in Australia?

Chippy, via email

Well, to be honest, some bad games have been banned (Manhunt 2, for example) but yes, some quality titles have fallen at the hands of our archaic ratings system. That being said, check out the news buddy boy - Fallout 3 has been 'adjusted' and will now be hitting the shores of Australia. Huzzah!

INSIDE GAMING

We chat it out with the latest Sackboy iteration: Sackboy Kratos

OPS: Oh - hi there little fella! We didn't see you there! What a little cutie! Oh, look everyone, he's all dressed up like a Spartan warrior!

Sackboy Kratos: (In a super deep, manly Kratos voice) I'm not cute! I'm a crazy killer, and I'll murder the crap out of you real good!

OPS: (Starts patting him on the head) Aw... look at the little guy! (In a baby voice) I'll bet you're a little heartbreaker aren'tcha? I bet all the little Sackgirls just love you...

Sackboy Kratos: I don't break hearts... I rip out spines, drink blood by the gallon, and dine upon the internal organs of my enemies! You got that straight Chipowski?

OPS: Hahah! Listen! He's trying to talk... aw. I love this little dude. (Pinches Sackboy Kratos on the cheek) Whatever will you say next you little nipper?! I've got to get one of these for Christmas...

Sackboy Kratos: ARGH!!! I will chomp on the sinewy flesh of your children, and do unspeakable stuff to your Mum. I will beat you thoroughly with a blunt instrument of my choosing! I will laugh as you drown in misery! I'll stick toffee on the roof of your dog's mouth! FEAR ME!

OPS: Oh, you're such a little scamp aren't you! Ya lil' rascal! A lil' toy with a bit of an edge. You're nuts! I love it!

Sackboy Kratos: I will tear out your

eyeballs and rape the socket. I will nibble *roughly* on your testicles, I will indulge in the biggest nipple twister man has ever seen. I will tear off your fingernails one by one and make a super-weird necklace. I am chaos incarnate! Hear me ROAR!

OPS: (Giggles and titters) I can't stay mad at you! C'mere, give me a wee cuddle! (Picks up Sackboy Kratos). My girlfriend is just going to love you!

Sackboy Kratos: ARRR!!! Get off me! Leave me alone. I'm going to get busy with your household pets! I'll eat all your Coco Pops when you're not looking and piss in your milk! Yeah, that's right! I'll mess with your breakfast routine! Put me down now! I'm a killer from the pits of HELL!!!





ROAD WORKS AHEAD!

The number one selling games on PSone, PS2 and PS3 have all been driving games. Can *Need for Speed Undercover* follow suit?



There are constants that we've come to expect. The seasons will change, we'll all get a year older, and at the end of the year *Need for Speed* will once again dominate the sales charts. Although the first of the series came out way back in 1994, the annual roll-out has delighted fans since 1997, a great year for gaming with the release of *Final Fantasy*

VII, *Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee* and *Gran Turismo*. Though not a good year otherwise with *Titanic* released in cinemas, Notorious B.I.G. gunned down on an LA street and Princess Di and Mother Theresa dying within a month of each other. It was also the first time they dropped the cop cars from *Need for Speed*.

So, we've set the scene.

Fast forward ten years to 2007 and *ProStreet*, a game that wasn't only devoid

of the men in blue but was also the first game since the 1997 release of *Need for Speed II* that didn't feature any illegal racing due to the enclosed tracks, and the response wasn't exactly stellar.

Something felt a little off and EA knows it. Executive producer of the *Need for Speed* series, John Doyle, admits "they took a risk", but there was a plan. EA's decision to "experiment with the box by changing the experience by 5% to 15%



■ Now look at what you've done. Your tires are RUINED



■ Broken stop signs – proof that cops can't read...



was to see if there would be an audience and what would that tell us?"

We also suspect that after a while it must have been difficult for the team at Black Box, Vancouver to keep up the enthusiasm for the same old asphalt year in and year out.

In fact, EA CEO John Riccitiello admitted that they were "torturing" the team north of the border with their ridiculous deadlines and after a loud, large sucking noise, he admitted that *ProStreet* kinda sucked. So, to rectify the situation they split the team in two. From now on *Need for Speed's* development teams will work on 24 month cycles, with *Need for Speed Undercover* to be the first title to benefit from the changes.

WE'RE IN

As these guys obviously have all the time in the world nowadays, they invited us up to the studio to check their progress and wax lyrical about how sexy it is to be *Undercover*, or is that covers?

Disappointingly, for a team with the stress taken off them there wasn't one 'vroom' sound to be heard. However, once ushered into what we assume was their very serious 'briefing' room, equipped with *Need for Speed* arcade machines and graffiti sprayed across the wall, we were ready for 'something' flashy.

Dim the lights and cue the flash of shiny red metal as *Undercover* unfolds across the screen, a sun-kissed array of urban cityscapes revealing more about the

direction that the series will be taking than any corny press release could ever convey.

A homage to the feathery streets of *Vice City*, with an obvious nod to the work that sister company Criterion put into *Burnout Paradise*, *Undercover's* signature is its visual style. A look that most will immediately associate with the Californian coastline, blue skies, beads of sun dotting the screen and lush water partnering you as you drift along the highways and causeways of the three urban areas that make up Tri-City.

The style smacks of a peaceful seaside drive, with a honey by your side, wind rustling your hair and not a care in the world, well except for those blaring sirens and the screeching of tires as you switch

into gear and get the f--- outta there. Yes, the cops are back! Better still, the story is built around the chase.

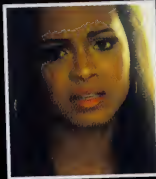
HOLLYWOOD SMILE

Looking to produce a "best of breed" with *Need for Speed Undercover*, Black Box threw together four words they felt represented a brand that had matured and perhaps needed a new splash of paint. Hanging their game on these four magical words, you'd expect them to be powerful and dynamic, but instead they're not only straightforward but more like directives for what makes a 'perfect' racing game. It is to be an 'open world', filled with 'action', dominated by 'adventure' and, of course, all about 'racing'. Behind this will run an

MEET THE CAST



Maggie Q as 'Chase Lin'



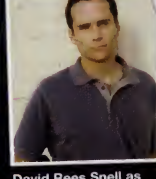
Christina Milian as 'Carmen'



Lawrence Adisa as 'Nickel Rogers'



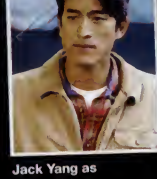
Heather Fox as 'Rose Largo'



David Rees Snell as 'G-Mac'



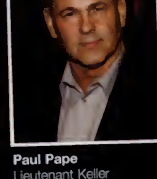
Joshua Alba as 'Zack'



Jack Yang as 'Chau Wu'



Kurt Caceres as 'Hector'



Paul Pape as 'Lieutenant Keller'



■ Proof that cops can't reverse park...



"emotional fiction" which, to break it down simply, means that it will have a narrative.

So, when it comes to pulling together a narrative that will grab you, thrill you and hopefully leave you hungry for more, the people in the know are those weird silicon filled, nipped and tucked individuals down in Hollywood.

Black Box headed to the bright lights of the flashy city to recruit writers, directors and actors, upping the production values not only of previous games, but the industry as a whole.

Going as far as building sets to find that 'film-quality' for the unique visual style of the game, *Undercover* offers a hint of the old school film noir, playing on light and shadows with an emphasis on colour.

Trapped within this urban wonderland, what's an undercover law enforcement officer to do except go with the flow?

Name checking *Mission Impossible*, *The Transporter* and the TV show *24* as influences, the *Fast and the Furious* trilogy obviously played a part in the planning of the story. Those that have previously been trying to piece together coherent story from whichroadtotake.com need struggle no more.

A whole load of messed-up shit is going down in Tri-City. The respectable people call it a cancer; those taking advantage of the situation call it one helluva ride. Stepping in as an undercover agent, you'll need to bust open the crime syndicates. Not such an easy task. The

only person on your side and the lifeline to your real life will be Chase Linh (who some will recognise as actress Maggie Q), a handler who manages your career and will hopefully keep you out of trouble and on track. The duality of the situation opens you up to various distractions with gangs, drugs and numerous other sources of mischief all at your disposal.

TRI AS YOU MIGHT

Undercover will have a distinctly *Most Wanted* feel due to its sandbox styled gameplay. Tri-City is surrounded by a dense road network providing enough space for over 50 hours of missions, known as 'beats' in the story arc, along with hundreds and hundreds of race

missions. These will include circuit races or *GTA* styled delivery of stolen cars to autoships and the like.

With the core of the experience taking place downtown, this Island city will take you into the hills and through industrial areas with districts given glossy names such as Palm Harbour, Sunset Hills and Gold Coast Mountains.

Set around a bay, which is made up of 130 kilometres of track, it will take an expert seven or eight minutes at top speed to do a complete lap of an area. Throw in traffic and you're lucky to make it around that area in double the time, with a full arcade damage physics engine in place to provide realistic damage.

A big focus during development has

CRUISING CRITERION

The resemblance between *Burnout Paradise* and the all new *Need for Speed Undercover* is obviously striking. Sitting down with executive producer John Doyle, we had to ask what kind of relationship the two companies had.

He admitted that there was a "lot of back and forth" between the

companies, but sharing between Guildford, England and Vancouver, Canada can be "hard".

Obviously sharing ideas is easier than technology and wouldn't you love to hear what they say in their bi-monthly meetings?

The advantage of having the two companies together means we

may see a *Need for Speed* MMO or better damage models, because as stated it's "not a case of they've been there, so we won't."

Translation? Well it seems that both companies are comfortable with each franchise stealing/borrowing each others idea for the good of each game as a whole.



been traffic density. Having invested a lot into making it variable, traffic will ramp up during missions and during highway battles. Adding a new layer of intelligence to gameplay, police and bosses will use car damage against you in order to stop you in your tracks. The crossing causeways built into the structure add to the chase, with the crossing lines leading to a build-up in intensity.

A new Heroic Driving Engine (HDE) has been created, which allows fluid and "realistic body motion".

With a quick flick of the joystick and tap of a button you can pull a 180° spin at full speed and drive in reverse, or attempt a 360° to throw off your chasers, check the damage

to your car and survey the scene. This means that for the first time you'll be able to get a full view of your car during gameplay.

Add in the ability to go straight from zero to a hundred and you are cooking with some serious gas. The only slight problem is that moving like this takes a little getting used to – this is specifically *not* for the novice player, but as you advance throughout the story and tune your car to maximum potential you'll be able to try the more tricky heroic moves.

Customisation is part of *Undercover's* DNA, and they're not quite ready to spill all the beans just yet, but with around 400 attributes ready to be tweaked, you can tell this aspect will be in-depth. Autosculpt will

once again allow you to create your own car from a visual perspective, but through handling and tuning players can also tweak their vehicle's performance.


PIT LANE

Sneaking in to take a pitstop we got a look at what they were hiding out the back – the workers! Either some kind of weird team bonding had been going on, or a freakish car accident had occurred at some stage during the game's development. On the 20th floor? Hmm... not possible.

With car debris *everywhere*, wheels attached to walls, racetracks marked on the floor with shiny yellow tape, it was obvious that the extra time given to the

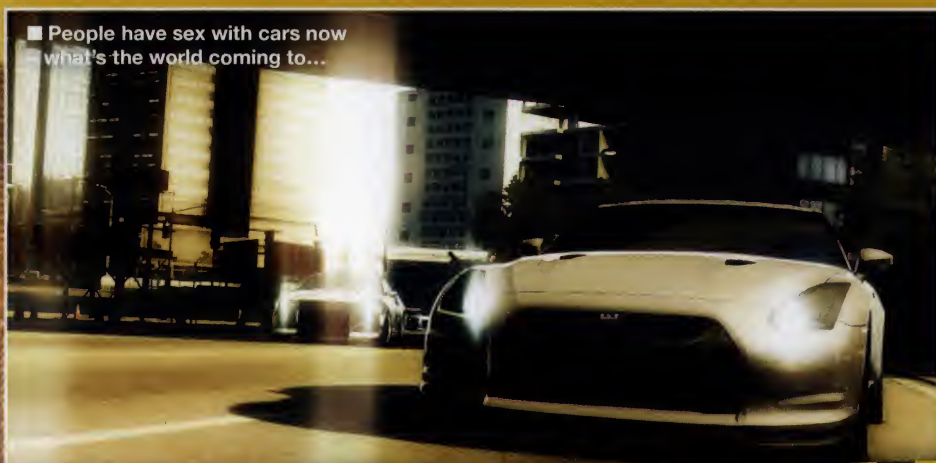
team had been used wisely – this was a team that lived and *loved* their product.

Offering us up the four food groups of racing and throwing in the pursuit feature, undoubtedly the most successful feature of the series, EA is aware that not revitalising the brand would result in nothing less than epic failure. However, they'd be foolish to reinvent the series and alienate their hardcore fans, as they did with *ProStreet*.

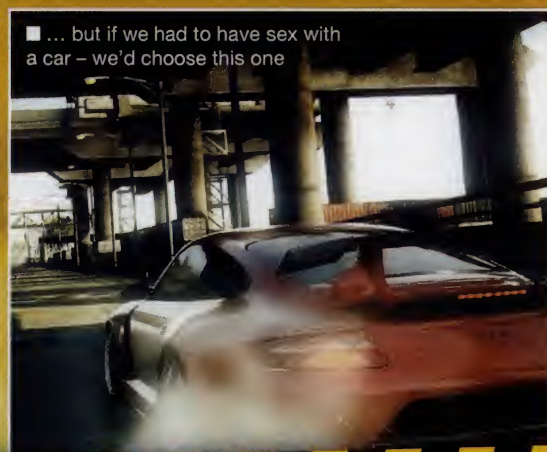
And while we posed the online question to Doyle, we received the standard, "we're not discussing that at this time" answer, but he was also quick to add that that "online is necessary" and that there would be a "need for content" – is user-generated content on the horizon? 



■ Why are their lights on? Seriously, it's like three in the bloody afternoon!



■ People have sex with cars now what's the world coming to...



■ ... but if we had to have sex with a car – we'd choose this one

THE BLACK BOX TREE

After rejecting the idea of letting loose exotic butterflies within the building, Black Box hired a helicopter to lower a 12-metre high bamboo tree through the roof. The tree was said to bring propensity to

its owner while it lived, and it has.

So when it got a little sick, they threw a pile of money at a tree doctor to fix it.

Days before we arrived, a Taco Bell blew up in downtown

Vancouver leaving Black Box without electricity. Worried that the lack of air con and water would kill the tree, someone had to walk up 20 flights of stairs daily to look after the thing...



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EXCLUSIVE looks at the very best

PREVIEWS

PS3 PS2 PSP

■ **GENRE:** SPORTS
■ **PLAYERS:** 1-TBA
■ **RELEASE:** EARLY 2009
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** EA
■ **DEVELOPER:** EA BLACK BOX
■ **WEB:** www.ea.com

■ Where am I? What the hell am I doing?
How did I get up here?



SKATE 2

Improving perfection?

In our humblest of humble opinions, the original *SKATE* was one of the defining moments of this console generation. A game that redefined the boundaries of the sports genre in general, *SKATE* was a title that featured brilliantly balanced gameplay with what is possibly one of the greatest control schemes ever conceived.

So when we heard the inevitable, that *SKATE* was about to receive a sequel, our first reaction was one of pure, unadulterated joy – a game we spent countless collective hours with was about to get revamped, and with minor tweekage this franchise could get pushed into the stratosphere.

But after the news sank in, we started

to get a bit nervy. We remembered the cautionary tale of another high profile skating franchise, a series that started off strong before swiftly disappearing up its own arse. A series that burdened itself with needless expansion and fernickity nonsense. Would our beloved *SKATE* suffer a similar fate?

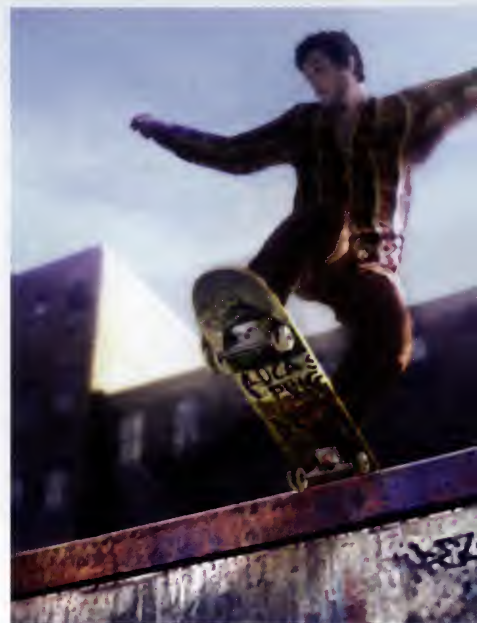
Well, probably not. Because firstly, with *SKATE* EA have thankfully avoided their irritating tradition of releasing an insignificant update with little to no upgrade in anything besides rosters. Secondly, the EA Black Box *SKATE* team positively live and breathe skating. If anyone is aware of the absolute necessity of retaining the credibility of the franchise, it's the *SKATE* team. They can be trusted

at the helm of *SKATE*, without a single shadow of a doubt.

SKATE, for all its majesty and splendour, was not perfect. The loading times were just that little bit too long, the ability to get off your board was frustratingly absent, and the online experience was, well, a bee's dick away from being completely and utterly broken.

You'll no doubt be pleased to hear then that pretty much every single aspect of *SKATE* that needed addressing has been addressed. The Black Box team has listened to the fans and tweaked the entire *SKATE* engine to perfection.

Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, the mild frame rate issues have been rectified – in a big way. *SKATE 2* has been





■ "Look ma, no hands!" "You're skating you 'tard, of course you're not using your hands..."



■ They see me rollin'... I mean grindin'... they hatin'. Perpetrating, they tryin' to catch me ridin'... I mean grindin' dirty. Oh, who am I kidding. It won't fit in the song...



■ "Girl power!" is what this chick would shout... if she was lame – and in the *Spice Girls*

"skating around San Vanelona will be 'baby bottom' smooth this time round..."

locked in an incredible 60fps frame rate – skating around San Vanelona will be 'baby bottom' smooth this time round.

But in many ways the 60 frames per second frame rate is more than a mere cosmetic upgrade – it's designed to aid and abet the precise controls *SKATE* is famous for. And speaking of controls, *SKATE 2* has a number of improvements and updates in this area, expanding upon the organic controls of the original to provide an experience even more in-depth than that of the first game.

Despite the updates, the control system remains remarkably similar to the original. The left analogue stick is essentially in control of your body, allowing you to shift weight, turn left and right, pull off 'fully sick bro' flips, etc; while the right analogue stick is used for tricks

utilising the board itself – such as a wide variety of different kick-flips, shove-its and the like.

Thankfully, *SKATE 2* doesn't deviate from this path, instead using the fundamentals of the original to expand in new, remarkably innovative directions.

Take, for example, the all-new finger flip tricks. A finger flip in skating requires that the skater grab the board, then flip it. So it makes perfect sense that to perform said trick in *SKATE 2*, players must first use the grab button (X or O) to grip the board, then use the flick-it controls on the right analogue stick to perform the finger flip. The *SKATE* team seem intent on expanding the trick set whilst keeping the whole thing as realistic as the original.

Another example comes from the use of the face buttons. In the original

SKATE, X and O corresponded to your right and left leg respectively. While *SKATE* limited this button/leg innovation to skateboard pushing only, *SKATE 2* revamps it, extending it to add a whole new dimension of trickery to the game.

Hippie jumps, where one jumps over an object while the skateboard travels underneath, is just one of the tricks unlocked by this new innovation. Footplants are another – a trick that not only looks rather spiffy, but helps players spring off into other combinations of tricks. Just like the original, *SKATE 2* looks set to have a deliciously balanced learning curve that will guarantee many satisfactory hours of game time.

But wait dear reader – there's more! In addition to the tweaked and peaked 'foot' tricks, EA Black Box have seen fit to add

I LIKE TO MOVE IT MOVE IT

SKATE 2 has an all-new feature enabling players to move around specific objects in the map in order to maximise the potential for 'off da heezey fo' scheezy' trickage. We're not too sure on the actual details regarding what can be moved and what can't, but it looks like any object not nailed down, such as tables, rails, et al, can be moved to your desired position when the player hops off his skateboard. In addition, the positioning of each object will remain static in the world – the game will remember where it's placed and when you come back hours/days/months later, it'll stay precisely where you left it.





INFO BYTE

Thankfully, instead of yearly updates ala FIFA et al, EA have allowed Black Box the time required to get *SKATE 2* right. According to developers the game will ship "when it's ready". We dig.



■ "Yeah! In your face wall! You thought you were so great, but I showed you alright!"



■ Welcome to the future. Nothing has a straight edge, and everyone wears chequered farm hand shirts...

THE GIRLS ARE BACK IN TOWN

One of the major complaints directed at the original *SKATE* was the apparent lack of females in the game. Not only was the game completely devoid of females, but you couldn't even make your own lady skater in the otherwise satisfactory create-a-skater feature. Thankfully *SKATE 2* now allows players to indulge in some well deserved chickage. In addition the whole create section of the game has undergone a complete revamp, with far more options, and a far greater scope – in all areas.



an all new 'hand' button (H). "Whoop-di-doo Basil!", you might exclaim – what does this mean for gameplay and the subsequent bag of tricks it unlocks? Well, basically, the addition of a 'hand' button allows players to perform the totally 'tubular' hand plants that were a notable omission from the first game.

Oh, and yeah – before we forget – you can now get off the board and walk around. Huzzah! No more hours spent 'hilariously' trying to skate up staircases to restart challenges.

With regards to the challenges... well, to be perfectly honest, EA went all 'Johnny tight lips' as to the exact details of *SKATE 2*'s challenges. We suspect, however, that this time round the single player campaign will be far more cinematic and plot-driven, since it has been suggested by some of the

developers that the team spent a lot more resources on in-game cutscenes this time round.

As for the story (again details are understandably scarce), San Vanelona has suffered at the hands of some unknown disaster, and has been rebuilt from scratch as 'New San Vanelona'. This all-new environment isn't quite the street skating mecca that the previous city was, and apparently some suited-up corporate types (those yuppie bastards...) want to keep it that way. We're assuming it will be your task to 'stick it to the man' via your 'bitchin' board skillz.

And while that story seems all well and good, we hope that the pure skating experience that existed in the original isn't lost in an attempt to add unnecessary story details to a formula that is nigh on perfect. *SKATE* was never about story,

or cutscenes, it was about traversing a brilliantly designed open city in search of incredible spots – and that's how we likes it. If this aspect of the game remains untouched for the sequel, then consider us happy chappies.

As if it wasn't there already, *SKATE 2* has rushed to the top of our most wanted list for 2009. **Mark Serrels**

BOTTOM LINE

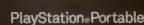
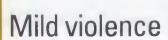
New tricks!
60 fps!
You can walk!

OPS is...
Salivating





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PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ **GENRE:** RACING
■ **PLAYERS:** 1-16
■ **RELEASE:** OCTOBER 2008
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** SONY
■ **DEVELOPER:** EVOLUTION
■ **WEB:** us.playstation.com



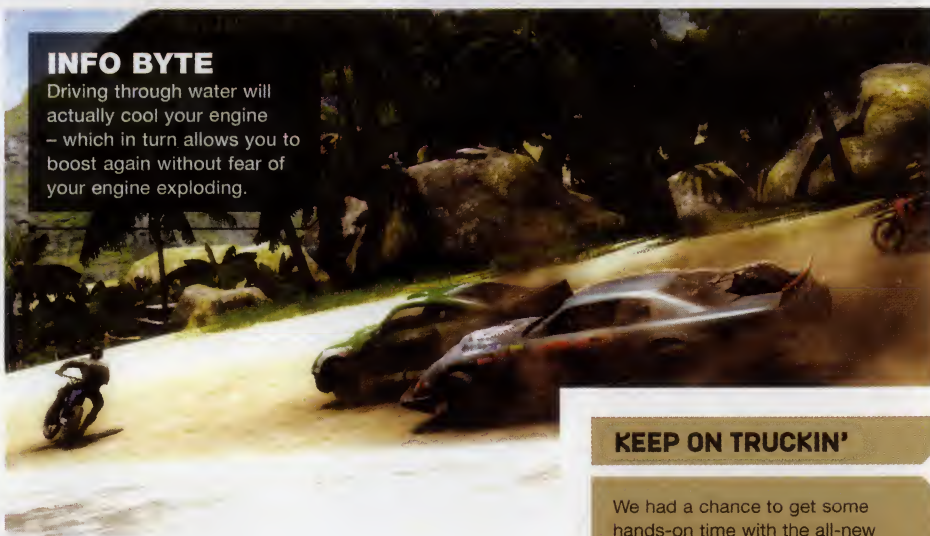
■ The oldest car in the world is also the gayest car in the world. Sadly it's not the fastest car in the world



■ "Um, Geoff. When you give the finger, you have to point it upwards..." "Ah, right! I knew I was doing something wrong"

INFO BYTE

Driving through water will actually cool your engine – which in turn allows you to boost again without fear of your engine exploding.



KEEP ON TRUCKIN'

We had a chance to get some hands-on time with the all-new monster trucks, and from what we saw/played they seem to be a solid, well-balanced addition to the extensive vehicle set. Crunching past smaller vehicles and crushing everything in your path is simply joyous – ATVs and motorbikes simply don't stand a chance in their presence. Be wary, though, on tight winding tracks they're next to useless – choose your path wisely if you want to use one of these bad boys...



MOTORSTORM: PACIFIC RIFT

Welcome to the jungle

The original *MotorStorm* rocked our world – it's that simple. And despite the fact that splitscreen multiplayer was notoriously absent, it was usually the first game you'd bust out when friends came over to check out your brand spanking new PS3. In short, it was one of the best launch titles ever, and a unique, fresh gaming experience that still stands tall to this day.

We'll be honest, *MotorStorm 2* probably won't provide that same experience, the insane feeling that the dimensions of gaming were expanding before your eyes. *MotorStorm* was a launch title after all – many have surpassed it visually since – and despite making improvements across the board, *Pacific Rift* looks set to make an incremental jump in its genre, as opposed to the huge generational leap its predecessor made.

For starters, it feels the same. Despite

the incredible visuals, the deliciously balanced boost feature was what *really* elevated *MotorStorm* to greatness, and that brilliant feeling of tension, hurtling into the straight with your vehicle on the verge of absolute destruction, remains. As does the branching track design, with multiple routes towards the same goal making a welcome re-appearance.

In short – the core of the *MotorStorm* experience remains, the only real change here is the scenery.

But it's a welcome change, there's only so much desert a man can take, and *Pacific Rift*'s move to the island paradise provides the game with scope for more variety in track design.

The tracks we got our hands on, however, didn't really espouse that variety – as both were set in the jungle, but we did get a decent grasp on how the new tracks feel compared to the originals. The major difference is the huge open vistas

from the original seem to be completely absent, as Evolution focus on tighter track designs that seem intent on increasing the feeling of claustrophobia, as opposed to the wide open chaos of the original.

It's hard to say if there has been a real improvement graphically, since the environments are so different, but splitscreen racing is an upgrade that is immediately tangible. Racing against friends via splitscreen is excellent fun, and even the texture hit the game takes to maintain performance is instantly forgotten as soon as the high jinks ensue.

So ultimately, while *Pacific Rift* takes *MotorStorm* into a whole new environment, the core experience remains the same. Evolution have been smart enough to retain the parts of *MotorStorm* that worked perfectly and expand into areas where it was previously lacking. At this stage we're aching to see the finished product. More please! **Mark Serrels**

BOTTOM LINE

✔ Splitscreen
✔ New environments
✔ Too claustrophobic

OPS is...
stormin'



PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ **GENRE:** ACTION
■ **PLAYERS:** 1-TBA
■ **RELEASE:** TBA 2008
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** EA
■ **DEVELOPER:** DICE SWEDEN
■ **WEB:** www.ea.com

■ Sniper rifle + close quarters combat = idiotic weapon choice



INFO BYTE

Paths in *Mirror's Edge* are actually colour coded, adding zest to the art design...



■ Your stylin' gloves won't save you this time

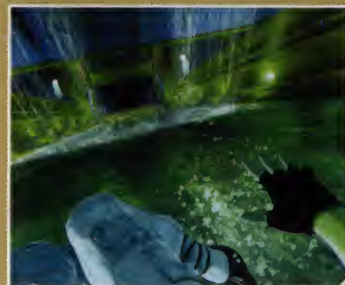


■ And the award for the most pointless screenshot of all time goes to...

PLANE SAILING

Traversing the rooftops of the game's futuristic city isn't going to be easy, so DICE has included a few abilities to help guide you if you get disorientated. The first of these is 'Runner's Sight', which gives you clues about what path to take by highlighting objects in red.

The second, optional feature, is 'Reaction Time', which slows time down to allow you to perfectly align Faith's movements with her environment. This mode also has the potential to make any huge leap look totally awesome.



MIRROR'S EDGE

Mirror, mirror on the wall...

Mirror's Edge takes place in a world where the streets are no longer safe. In an age of increasing violence and oppression, sensitive packages and information are entrusted to a group of people known as 'runners'. These runners use the rooftops as their highways, flitting to and fro to deliver unto their employers each message with the utmost discretion.

You'll play as Faith, an aptly named protagonist, as much of the game will involve taking risky leaps from skyscraper to skyscraper in a bid to carry out your mission and also avoid those strange government soldiers that appear to want you dead. We're not certain why the bad guys will be shooting at you (story details are fairly thin) but it has something to do with your sister being held by a corrupt

government and Faith's involvement in running for criminal organisations.

The defining feature of *Mirror's Edge* is the way in which the game presents an explicitly realistic first-person perspective. There is no HUD, and you will see Faith's hands and arms behave in a manner that reacts to what you are doing in the game.

Run hard and Faith will start to breathe heavily; land awkwardly and she'll grunt like an overzealous tennis player. You'll also see Faith's legs shoot out in front as you slide beneath structures or tackle said bad guys.

The controls are themed around your forward movement through the game – almost every spectacular parkour move requires you to use momentum and precision timing. The left stick will set you off at a running pace, with the bumper

buttons acting as contextual inputs. Faith's exact reaction will vary depending on your situation, as well as how fast you're moving.

Tap **LT** and you'll jump, climb up or vault over whatever is in front of you. Pressing **LB** sends Faith into a low slide or makes her roll after a particularly heavy landing – it also acts as a fighting move to sweep enemies off their feet.

To round out the controls, turning around or spinning is handled via **RT**. Put all the controls together and you have almost endless acrobatic possibilities. In fact, the game will require you to learn how to string moves together in order to keep a smooth, rhythmic line across some quite complex environmental puzzles.

Mirror's Edge is slated for release later in the year and after its showing at E3

we can safely say that we can't wait to hit the ground running with this one. The combination of first-person embodiment and intriguingly stark art design (there is hardly any colour) has us itching to give it a go. It's looking both original and fun, so hopefully it'll deliver. **— Dylan Burns**

BOTTOM LINE

Original presentation
Contextual controls
Combat seems clunky

OPS is...
Running scared



PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ **GENRE:** SPORT
■ **PLAYERS:** 1-7 (1-20 ONLINE)
■ **RELEASE:** OCTOBER 2008
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** EA
■ **DEVELOPER:** EA CANADA
■ **WEB:** ea.com.au

INFO BYTE

This version of FIFA has quite possibly the largest rogue's gallery yet – Ronaldinho, Rooney, Ribery. All damn ugly.



■ Rooney – he's ugly. Not Luke Chadwick ugly... but pretty ugly

■ Ronaldinho – he's fat now

FIFA 09

In all seriousness, we are already obsessed.

We haven't wanted something so bad since we were tots and got a glimpse of the udderous goodness hanging from our mother's chests. *FIFA 09* is shaping up to be – possibly – the greatest sporting release since Michael Jackson last ogled someone who didn't rely on an allowance. We're basing this on a couple of things. Firstly *UEFA EURO 2008*, EA's previous football child, was close to being nigh on perfect in the gameplay stakes, and secondly the new batch of goodies promised for *FIFA 09* sound good enough to mate with. It seems like a bet worth putting the ranch on.

Following on from *UEFA*, EA have once again poured a lot of their focus into the thing that really matters in a football

game: the football. To that end, *FIFA 09* is all about cranking up the responsiveness, the sugary fluidness that makes football the sport of sports. Apparently there'll be 250 new core gameplay tweaks, fiddles and touch ups to this end. While that sounds like a bit of wank, we're surmising that within that lot will be at least some changes worth harping about.

Some of the new gameplay adjustments look set to minimise those annoying football gaming moments we've had to tolerate over the years. Ever sworn you've passed to a winger, bolting up the sideline towards goal, only to instead pump it towards a heavily marked team mate standing in no man's land? It's a regular occurrence, but one that has supposedly been remedied with *09's*

brushed up passing system. How about missing first-time shots mere metres out from an open goal? Yeah, that's been reworked too, with new first-time shooting mechanics. The other big skill, dribbling, has also been polished up and will allow even more precision when, say, you're trying to turn past a defender or cut through the backline.

Another new on-field addition that we like the sound of is improved player AI when making runs. Not only will players making dashes move a lot faster off the ball than in possession, but they'll also gesture where they want it. That's sass, that's what *that* is.

FIFA 09 has also enlisted in Physics 101 as momentum is now in the house. Slide tackles, challenges, air collisions,

how high your player leaps for the ball, the power of shots – everything will now be at the mercy of the game's physics engine. Previous versions left it all in the hands of the football fairy, but it'll now be determined by each player's weight and speed. This should split open the game with the sensitivity of a guillotine. From now on the roster of your team and how they're controlled will become even more crucial. It'll be folly to try and mark Drogba, for instance, with your bony winger during a cross or corner. No, you'll now be forced to get to know your full backs as well as your glory-hunting forwards. It's all going to be a much more precise and intimate affair.

And woe betide if you don't take such match-ups seriously. For one, headers



have been completely revamped. On-field players are now free of the invisible shackles that locked them down prior to receiving a header. Now you can try to ride the momentum system by going for a run up to win the ball mid flight. Needless to say if you're controlling a big boy charging up for a big header, you're either going to win the ball or cop a nasty visit from the whistleblower in black.

With such adherence to physics and player attributes it's a legitimate concern that weaker teams might now be booked in for a permanent pasting against the Manchester Uniteds of the world. While it's true that weaker teams will never be able to compete pound-for-pound in the skill stakes, *FIFA 09* is set to include a potential equaliser – that being a whole

new way of applying strategy and tactics to each match-up. It will now be even more viable to try and get ahead with your head rather than your boot.

There'll be three tactical groups or 'buckets' players can tweak that cover defense, attacking chance creation and attacking build up. Each will contain a handful of sliders that can be altered to create customisable play styles for each match. It'll be possible then to take on the might of a Premier League club with an A-League team and play for less of a pasting by sitting back to jockey and create counterattacking opportunities.

Speaking of which, all you Soccerroo and A-League fans can relax in the knowledge that the A-League will again be fully featured in *FIFA*, as too will the

national Aussie squad complete with all the official bells and whistles.

Finally the 'Be A Pro' mode has been expanded. Now gamers can pick a player and control him throughout four seasons, building up his stats. More good news is that if you get bored playing the same position you can actually choose to swap which player you're controlling halfway through the season.

With the exception of a free copy of *FIFA Street* and *FIFA Manager*, *FIFA 09* looks set to feature all the football fever any lover of the game would want. Super on-field play, gorgeous visuals and comprehensive club and online support mean the only football fans not looking forward to this one are the ones that work for Konami. **James Ellis**

10 VS. 10 ONLINE!!!

We almost turned feral with glee when we heard this. Improving on 08's 'Be A Pro: Online Team Play' that allowed 5-on-5 play, 09 will support up to 10-on-10 online play! That's ten players per side assigned to a position, all playable online! EA are actually planning on having the full 11-on-11 online play up for a 2010, but provided it works well we'll be cheery enough letting the computer make all the saves for now.



BOTTOM LINE

- Best soccer game ever?
- 10-on-10 play!
- Visuals worth \$2m a match

OPS is...
Itchin'

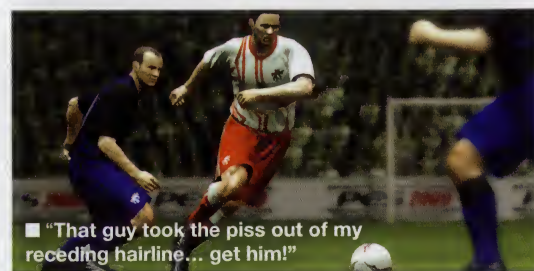


PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ **GENRE:** SPORTS
■ **PLAYERS:** 1-TBA
■ **RELEASE:** LATE 2008
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** ATARI
■ **DEVELOPER:** KONAMI
■ **WEB:** www.konami.com



■ "Is it a bird... is it a plane?" "No you idiot, it's a ball - we're playing soccer, remember?"



■ "That guy took the piss out of my receding hairline... get him!"

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2009

No excuses!

Our relationship with *Pro Evolution Soccer* is much like an epic love affair gone horribly wrong. It was lust at first sight when we first laid eyes on *International Superstar Soccer* on ye olde Super Nintendo, lust which developed into full-blown affection as the series kicked into overdrive on the PSone.

Things got hot and heavy, and by *Pro Evo 4* we swore to never love another soccer franchise again, for better or worse, till death do us part.

But that's when things got ugly.

Year after year our soccer spouse would pimp slap us, knee us in the groin and leave us bloodied and bruised with disappointment after disappointment. Where's out next gen upgrade? We would ask, in a beaten down scream, before being cut down with a cruel fist.

But we didn't leave - like all abused spouses we sensed the goodness at the heart of *Pro Evo* and, above all, we believed we could change the series.

True love - ye be a harsh mistress.

But just as we were about to throw *Pro Evo* to the curb, and invite the charming, handsome *FIFA 09* into our midst, wouldn't you know it - old Seabass comes-a-crawling, begging on his hands and knees. Just one more chance... I can change, he says.

Okay - extended metaphors aside, with *Pro Evolution Soccer 2009*, we've been promised a complete overhaul. One of the major areas of improvement is with regards to the AI and the tactics opposing teams will employ. Teamvision, the much heralded system from *Pro Evo 2008*, has been revamped and will now adjust tactics on the fly, adapting intelligently to

the tactics you employ throughout the course of the game.

Visually, the game will be beefed up significantly, with new animations for each player and all-new character models, but the major addition for *Pro Evo* this year is with regards to the new 'Become a Legend' mode, which allows you to create-a-player and control him throughout his entire career.

Players can only choose to be a midfielder or a striker, but unlike *FIFA's* 'Be a Pro' mode, there is no limit on how many seasons you can partake in as your player. This mode will be part of a revamped online section, as you and others can use your 'Become a Legend' player in matches.

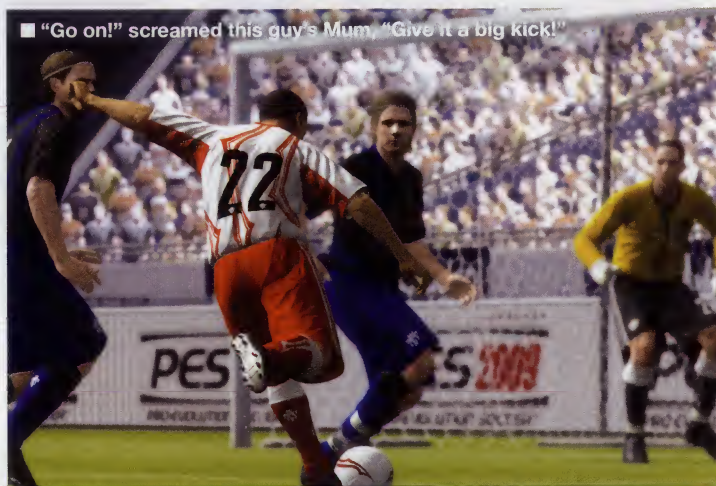
Again, like last year, choosing between potential suitors won't be easy. This time, more than ever, EA is looking to produce a genuine contender that could obliterate *Pro Evo* for good. We're withholding judgement for now, but there's no excuse for the domestic abuse we've had to take from *Pro Evo* over the last couple of years. This is their very last chance at glory... ♣ Mark Serrels

BOTTOM LINE

- Be a Legend
- Complete overhaul
- Do we believe?

OPS is...

Abused



■ "Go on!" screamed this guy's Mum, "Give it a big kick!"



INFO BYTE

This baby is already out in Japan. The blokes in Konami are in the process of making sure the version released in the West is up to scratch.

IT'S GONNA GET MESSI...

Weird looking, fresh off the 'new Maradona' conveyor belt they have installed somewhere in Argentina, runner up world player of the year, Lionel Messi is on the cover of *Pro Evolution Soccer 2009*. After being diagnosed with a hormonal growth disorder as a child, Messi has quickly climbed up the ranks to become the greatest prospect in soccer today. Most experts would place him second only to Cristiano Ronaldo in the list of the world's best players.



"I MADE IT MYSELF!"

For what is essentially an arcade racer, *Pure* has a very detailed build-your-own ATV mode. Turismo's can put it together, bit-by-bit – lovingly assembling their dream ATV with everything except for fluffy dice. Impatient rev heads can just keep pressing 'random' until something they like pops up. You can then use your DIY ATV to race against mates at home or online. Now everyone's happy! Hooray for everything!



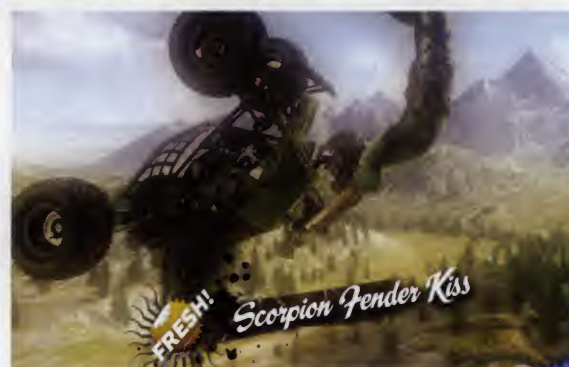
INFO BYTE

Developer Black Rock Studios were formerly Climax Racing – developers of the *Moto GP* and *ATV Offroad Fury* franchises.



PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

- **GENRE:** RACER
- **PLAYERS:** 1-16 (ONLINE)
- **RELEASE:** OCTOBER 2008
- **DISTRIBUTOR:** FUNTASTIC
- **DEVELOPER:** BLACK ROCK
- **WEB:** www.funtastic.com.au



PURE

Don't THINK and drive - just fang it, baby!

There are two types of racing game fans in the world. One group - let's call 'em 'Turismos' - don't want a car game so much as a driving simulator.

The other type - your rev head arcade cat - cares not for reality. Point of fact, the less pragmatic and more insanely over-the-top the game is the better.

Enter *Pure*: a title that will appeal to the latter group but has elements a Turismo might enjoy.

Pure is a high octane ATV racer. We've had loads of ATV games before - usually paired with motorbikes and rally cars - but *Pure* is pure-ly an ATV title.

With *MotorStorm 2* on the way, with its wide variety of vehicles and brain-hurtingly complex tracks, a game that only has ATVs would seem something of a risky venture. So what does *Pure* offer?

For a start it looks absolutely beautiful. In a muddy, rocky, hilly kind of fashion, you understand, but damn pretty nonetheless. Plus, the tracks are broad, imaginative and feature a ludicrous number of paths one can take to the end.

But nice graphics alone do not a good racer make, so it's handy that *Pure*'s gameplay is as sweet as a piglet wearing a top hat and bow tie.

The courses have massive hills, allowing the driver to get insanely huge air. Whilst in the blue yonder you can perform tricks that unlock further crazy stunts.

It breaks down like this: you're hooning along, you get to the top of a decent-sized hill, pull the analogue stick down and flick it up off the top and tweak the stick while pressing X. If you do it right you'll pull off a spectacular stunt and

begin to charge up your trick meter.

Said meter will fill until it reaches 100%, so now you can perform 100% tricks. After doing more mad, gravity-defying moves you'll unlock 200% tricks and finally the character's specific special move by hitting 300% and 300% simultaneously.

These moves are hard to pull off (and stacking it will knock a section off your trick meter) but they look awesome, ranging from standing on your ATV playing air guitar, lying flat on your seat and spinning around and various other completely implausible but highly enjoyable signature moves. Be careful, though, if you pull off the same move too many times in a row you'll get significantly less charge as a reward.

So far *Pure* is looking dandy. Great graphics, easy to pick up controls,

imaginative tracks and, for the Turismos, the ability to create your very own ATV - choosing every single individual part.

Will this be the new *MotorStorm* or just a game where you ride lawn mowers with delusions of grandeur? We'll let you know soon. **Anthony O'Connor**

BOTTOM LINE

- Huge air time
- Tracks with multiple paths
- Perhaps a tad shallow

OPS is...

Pure



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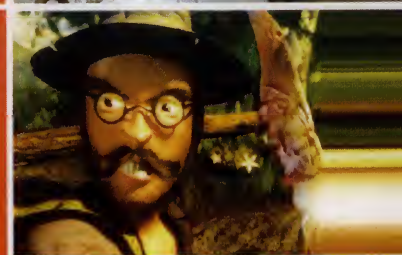
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NICOLE MANN - Qantm student success story

www.qantm.com.au

Nicole Mann has parlayed her study at Qantm College into an exciting career with one of Brisbane's cutting-edge companies

What does Liquid Interactive do?

We're a digital creative agency. We form part of Liquid Creative Studios which means we often get to work on jobs that combine 3D animation and visual effects. We also work on a range of eLearning projects for the corporate and educational sectors. We've got a strong technology base which means we have the knowledge to produce a diverse and wide variety of projects. This includes

websites and microsites, banners, games, viral campaigns and e-Learning amongst others.

What does your role as Production Manager entail?

I'm involved in the day-to-day running of the business. This includes scheduling staff, resourcing and project management. It's about ensuring projects stay on track with time and budget whilst still ensuring they meet their objectives and client satisfaction. We have a great team of about seventeen here at Liquid Interactive and my role sees me working with every one of them on a daily basis.

Did you have to do any study for that? Where?

I studied at QANTM college in Brisbane. I hold a degree in Applied Multimedia.

How was it?

It was enjoyable. The things I learnt there really help with what I'm doing now. Even though I'm not doing any actual 'development' my knowledge helps me understand what's involved in each project and I have a greater appreciation of what our production staff actually do. Everything we were taught was up to date and the lecturers and tutors were always willing to help.



PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ **GENRE:** SHOOTER
■ **PLAYERS:** 1-TBA
■ **RELEASE:** TBA 2009
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** ACTIVISION
■ **DEVELOPER:** RAVEN SOFTWARE
■ **WEB:** www.activision.com

INFO BYTE

The game continues directly from where 2001's *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* left off.



■ "Come out with your hands up, and bring some sauerkraut. We're German - we love that stuff."



■ Standing next to a barrel? In a videogame situation? Suicide...



■ This gun obliterates people. Literally...

WOLFENSTEIN

Take out occult crazy Krauts for schnitz 'n' giggles

Remember when you first sat down and watched the original *Hellboy* movie's opening scene? There were dozens of Nazi scientists, soldiers and crazy cultists, all attempting to open supernatural gates into the mystical unknown, when all of a sudden a bunch of 'ooh-rah!' American troops, ready to rid the world of this Nazi pestilence, burst onto the scene and started fragging everything in sight. Didn't you love it?

We're you revelling in the cool? We sure as hell were, and it gets cooler. Imagine if one of our most loved franchises got the next-gen treatment and was starting to look a hell of a lot like what we just described. Do you think that might be something you'd be interested in?

WHAT'S OLD IS NOW NEW

There are a lot of people out there that reckon the WWII genre has done its dash. You know what we say to them after performing a curb stomp on their uneducated craniums? We tell them we beg to differ. The upcoming *COD: World at War* gives a new slant, and arena to play in, yet that's not the only bag of tricks in Activision's repertoire - there's more.

It's been a fair whack between drinks for the old *Wolfenstein* series, but now it's back, with a vengeance, and to those fools who thought the genre was done and dusted, we ask, how do you like dem apples, homie?

Those familiar with the franchise will be pleased to know that the most manliest of

men, the allied super soldier you all know and love, Sgt. BJ Blazkowicz, is back for another round of Kraut kicking combat.

The latest demo we checked out was looking pretty damn slick. Early scenes depicted our hero liberating a small town from 'ze Germans' with some stock standard FPS elements. We really like the non-linear gameplay, which left us free to explore the surrounding area, and dispatch the Nazi aggressors in any number of ways. Caught against overwhelming numbers, we doubled back and managed to jump onto a rooftop, which put us in a perfect sniping position.

After popping the heads off a couple, we jumped down to a turret and hummed happily to ourselves as we wiped the rest



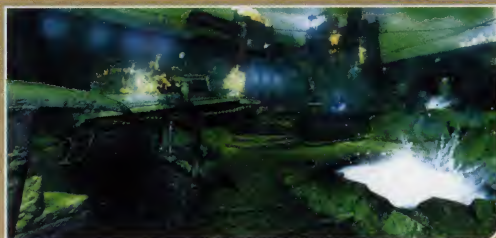


■ This gun is the third most powerful weapon in the universe... behind Chuck Norris' fist, and his beard



■ "It's like some twisted, backwards version of *The Little Mermaid*"

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED



'The Veil' is the name for an alternate dimension that holds the key to unlocking 'The Black Sun', which is a source of mystical power to animate and infuse the Nazi troops with paranormal abilities and powers. It bears a remarkable resemblance to the 'Gloom' used by angels and devils in the *Nightwatch* and *Daywatch* films (minus the flies). This twist on reality is in a constant state of upheaval and decay, and filled with all different types of nasty, so be careful.

of those melon farmers out for their sins.

We also dug that when you zoom in to aim, the edges of the screen go blurry to depict your more focused and centred field of vision – that crates and boxes, used for cover, smashed after absorbing a few rounds, and weren't magically impervious to gunfire – but you're not left to save the world on your own.

As we progressed, besides other Allied troops, we encountered members of a resistance who aided us with cover fire and led us to our destination. We were told they'll regularly supply back up, weapons and ammunition, and give you access to safe houses and side missions, which gives you that whole 'underground movement' type of feeling. Then things got a little trippy, and it all had to do with The Veil...

STEP ON THROUGH TO THE OTHER SIDE

The Veil (see THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED) gives players access to an arcane power source known as 'The Black Sun'. The Nazis are using this to power up firearms, create armour and, ultimately, to fuel a weapon of mass destruction and take over the world (surprise, surprise). The only way to take down such Veil-powered enemies is to meet them head on, in their element. The killer part about this is that you can jump into the Veil as well, whenever you like, leaving you with a whole new swag of possibilities.

You can slow time down and move virtually unharmed by gunfire (normal that is) for a short amount of time. The screen washes over green, there's swirling mist everywhere, and you feel like you're in the eye of a tornado. It's also populated with funky looking little creatures. Some docile, others not so much, like the heavily armed trooper we came across. After some intelligent use of cover, we crept in and out of the Veil until we'd nailed that sucker. We then helped ourselves to his righteous energy weapon and went off in search of the next kill. Want to know more? You'll just have to wait and see what's on the cards, but we really like what we've seen so far. **— Dave Kozicki**

BOTTOM LINE

- Arcane weaponry
- The Veil!
- Needs a crossover with *Hellboy*

OPS is...

Ready to Kick Kraut butt.



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PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ **GENRE:** SHOOTER
■ **PLAYERS:** 1-12 (ONLINE)
■ **RELEASE:** TBA 2008
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** THQ
■ **DEVELOPER:** VOLITION
■ **WEB:** community.redfaction.com

INFO BYTE

The multiplayer maps are quite small, but with up to 12 players on each you'll be too busy fragging to care.



■ The flamethrower: for when you absolutely, positively have to set every motherf%&*er on fire...



RED FACTION: GUERRILLA

Bend me, break me, any way you want me

If you think you've seen some awesome destruction in games lately, thanks to titles such as *Battlefield: Bad Company* and its well documented wall-blowing shenanigans, then think again – you ain't seen nothin' yet! Welcome to *Red Faction: Guerrilla*, a game where buildings can crumble, bend and topple over realistically thanks to one of the most complex damage systems we've seen to date.

Having been privy to four of the game's multiplayer maps, we definitely can't wait to experience the single

player portion, but we'll have to don our patience hats for that. Until then, we have some multiplayer to sink our teeth into.

There are two main multiplayer modes, the first of which is called 'Damage Control', wherein you must play a game of tug-of-war with the opposing team. In this mode, you need to build up several towers using your Reconstructor (a weapon that literally rebuilds any broken building, wall or fence) to gain points, while at the same time destroying the opposing team's towers (with sledge hammers that are also effective melee





RECONSTRUCT ME BABY!

The Reconstructor is perhaps the most tactical weapon in the game. Once you've beaten a wall down like a rebellious child, how about turning around and repairing it to stop anyone from following you? Or even better, rebuild nearby buildings right in front of that bastard who is shooting at you – not only will it stymie his attack, it may even lead the mongrel into an ambush.

Each map is full of scrap metal debris, machinery, shipping crates and concrete barriers, so we can definitely see a team dominating if they utilise a couple of Reconstructors to help maintain a fortified position.



“Not since *Half Life 2* has a title been so focused on the player's physical interaction with the world.”

weapons). This probably sounds easy in theory, but in practice it can be tactically complex. You'll definitely need to work as a team during this mode.

The second mode, called 'Team Anarchy', is your traditional team deathmatch. This is just as frenetic, particularly given the game's inclusion of special backpacks, each of which has its own particular power-up ability.

The Firepower backpack gives your bullets extra punch for a short amount of time. Each player has a fair bit of health,

so Firepower definitely comes in handy; it's not uncommon for someone to go flying from an explosion and still be able to dust themselves off and keep fighting.

Rhino, once activated, causes you to charge forwards with a force-field surrounding you; this is great for bowling peeps over as well as running through walls Juggernaut style. Concussion sends out a shock wave from your character's feet, and Fleetfoot is handy for short bursts of speed. But the coolest power-up by far is the Jetpack, which

although simple in application – making you jump and fly higher – provides for some hilarious antics as you jet about each level.

We could be in for some fantastic single-player moments if *Red Faction: Guerrilla*'s multiplayer is anything to go by. Not since *Half Life 2* has a title been so focused on the player's physical interaction with the world. Those are some big boots to fill; we'll keep you posted on how the full game plays.

— Dylan Burns

BOTTOM LINE

- Awesome destruction
- Backpacks rock!
- Patchy framerate

OPS is...
Hammerin'...



PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ **GENRE:** SHOOTER
■ **PLAYERS:** 1-32 (ONLINE)
■ **RELEASE:** LATE 2008
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** SONY
■ **DEVELOPER:** GUERRILLA GAMES
■ **WEB:** www.guerrilla-games.com

INFO BYTE

Killzone 2 is shaping up to be the premiere PS3 shooter, trumping the series' first effort already in demo form and with 32 player online battles, is looking mighty good.

MULTIPLAYER

We didn't get a chance to look at multiplayer, but we do know it'll be something of a cross between the *Battlefield* model and *Call of Duty 4* – only much more customisable in terms of how you create your soldier. Instead of being locked into a specific class with default skills and attributes, you'll be able to mix it up to match your style of play. Up to 32 players will be able to play online, with the ability to create guilds and battle for in-game currency to spend on making the strongest units. We'll know more next issue after Leipzig, where multiplayer will be playable for the first time.



■ "Hey dude, is it just me, or are our eyes on frickin' fire?"



■ "Hey guys... guys? Watch me light my own fart with a grenade" "Johnny, NOOOOOOOO!!!"

■ The reload animations are awesome...



KILLZONE 2

Highway to the... killing zone?

There is no doubt all eyes are squarely on Guerrilla Games and *Killzone 2*. The hype surrounding the first, followed by the hubbub of the sequel's first showing all those E3's ago, means punters are keen to see if it fixes all the issues we had with the first outing, and lives up to the visual splendour Sony have promised outside of Guerrilla's own words about the game.

Well, OPS had a chance to not only check the game out at this year's E3, in full playable form, but also at the more recent Sony Australia PAUSE event. What can we say right off the bat? Well for one, the promised visual splendour is well and truly on its way to being delivered in full. The level of detail in the game's environments is breathtaking (and we've only seen the one very grey level, so far), while the animations for both the ISA and Helghast are really something to behold.

Enemies drop and fall dead with such realism, you'll wonder how we've dealt with such over-the-top ragdoll deaths in games for so long. Moreover, the advent of robust, destructible environments has opened the gameplay up tenfold. Not only can you now think outside the box of ways to dispatch the Helghast, you yourself need to be on your toes in case the newly revamped AI is thinking along the same lines.

One particular portion of our playable demo saw us manning a mounted machine gun facing a wall-less building ahead with numerous floors. Once on the turret, Helghast, like so many angry wasps, start piling out of the shadows on the various floors, firing at us with merry abandon. The solution? Bombard the building (and its precariously placed red explosive barrels) for a while until the whole thing collapses; toppling below,



■ "Tanks' for the 'tanks'"

Helghast aboard and all. Bloody brilliant.

During the skirmish (which took around 30 minutes to clearly play through), we faced a number of fairly obviously scripted events, and while we've been told there will be moments in the game with more than one way to play through, overall you'll be looking at a pretty linear game (in a similar fashion to *Call of Duty 4*). You'll be able to carry two weapons at any one time and swap them on the fly, while a new cover system has also been implemented with blind and out-of-cover firing all fairly easy and intuitive to use. Controls at this stage did feel a bit sticky, but we were tackling an early build, so we're hoping Guerilla will loosen them up for the final build.

Seriously though, so far so good

from our end: it's action-packed, intense, stunning to look at and has already pushed far ahead of its predecessor. Now we just have to see what else Guerrilla have in store leading up to the game's final release. **Stephen Farrelly**

BOTTOM LINE

Texture work is incredible
Amazing animations...
Maybe a bit linear?

OPS is...
Loving it!



PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ **GENRE:** ACTION
■ **PLAYERS:** 1-8 (ONLINE)
■ **RELEASE:** OCTOBER 2008
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** ACTIVISION
■ **DEVELOPER:** DAY 1 STUDIOS
■ **WEB:** www.activision.com

IT'S MANTASTIC

Now we're not in denial or totally oblivious to the fact that, like many of us, you might also have a 360 and have probably played a little game called *Halo 3*. Where are we going with all this? Glad you asked. Where the game that rhymes with J-Lo has the wimpy 'man-cannon' to propel you across the maps, *Fracture* has the significantly more manly, magnificent, man-tastic man-a-pult! Just hit the switch and get flung into the wild blue yonder.



BOTTOM LINE

- Decidedly different
- Cool new modes
- Too gimmicky?

OPS is...
On solid ground



INFO BYTE

Those melee fans will need to be sharp – the attack is fairly weak and takes several hits to take an opponent down.

■ "Yeah that's it baby" (camera shutters) "Yeah, a little more moody... now flex. Yeah, beautiful baby!"

FRACTURE

Did the earth move for you too?

So we get the call from our good buddies at Activision to come on over and get some multiplayer action on with *Fracture*, the non-*Star Wars* LucasArts property. They said if we were good, they'd throw in a bang-up lunch, and perhaps even a few brewskis (we seem to have a few blank spots in our memory of that arvo... oh well).

We've gotta tell ya, from the start, we felt like we were on shaky ground. Now, don't get us wrong, but for those who don't know, *Fracture* is all about transforming the terrain around you for tactical advantage or, simply put, to squash and kill stuff. We like killing stuff. It makes us feel like big men (Ness excluded for obvious reasons) – don't judge us.

Taking up the mantle of one of two

warring factions, the Atlantic Alliance or the Pacifican Army, players have all the usual third person shooter bells and whistles at hand, but it's this new terrain-altering bizzo, unique to *Fracture*, that really changes the way you play the game. We had a muck about with the more traditional 'Capture the Flag' and 'Deathmatch' modes. Each player has the ability to raise or lower the ground (and then blow it up if desired) via weaponry and grenades. Sounds simple enough, right? But here's where it gets interesting.

You can raise the ground to create cover for yourself and team-mates, jump on top to take up an elevated sniping position, or lower an enemy into a valley and pummel him with bullets and grenades from the higher ground. Wait, it gets better – some areas are underground, so why not use your new powers to smush an enemy into

the roof of a compound, or block off the entrance to your flag with these abilities? Kinda hard to capture the flag, when you can't get to it, innit? The one thing to remember is everyone has the same tools at their disposal, so if you can raise them up, someone else can pull it back down.

We then moved onto 'Excavate', a mode exclusive to *Fracture*. It involves uncovering mineral deposits and then propelling them upwards into towers. Then you need to defend it for a certain amount of time. This is a cool tweak to what is essentially 'Zones' in *Warhawk* or 'Turf War' in *GTA IV*. So far, *Fracture* is looking pretty solid, but we're wondering if everyone will embrace and incorporate this new style of play, or ignore it and revert to more traditional methods. Time will tell. **— Dave Kozicki**

■ Explosions, lightning, rocks, ice, fire. In fact, now that we think about it, this could be the best screenshot of all time...



■ "Hahaha! Eat it. Yeah. Eat my green... um, stuff"



PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ **GENRE:** ACTION
■ **PLAYERS:** 1
■ **RELEASE:** NOVEMBER 2008
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** EA
■ **DEVELOPER:** EA
■ **WEB:** www.deadspace.ea.com



■ Is it hot in here, or is it just my molten hot lava ejecting machine thing?

DEAD SPACE

In space, no one can hear you... dismember?

Of the three major 'survival horror' titles coming to PS3 in the not-too-distant future, it's perhaps surprising to discover that a new property from Electronic Arts appears ready to hold more than its own against genre heavyweights from Capcom and Konami.

Resident Evil 5 and *Silent Hill: Homecoming* seem to be struggling with the burden of their legacy and fan expectation. Now in their fifth iterations, both games are standing at a crossroad; one way lies innovation, the other lies convention, and they are torn over which direction to take.

Imagine what Capcom and Konami could do if they didn't have to maintain the links that define each series. Imagine if they could overhaul their control schemes or abandon their anachronistic game logic. Untethered by a history, EA's *Dead*

Space has the freedom to choose its own path and seems to be all the better for it.

You play Isaac Clarke (bonus points if you know the two sci-fi authors he's named after), an engineer heading the investigation team sent to find out why the space station Ishimura suddenly dropped out of communication with Earth. When you arrive, in true sci-fi tradition, you discover the station is derelict, the crew no longer human, and the alien menace that caused it all is still lurking in the dark, cold corridors.

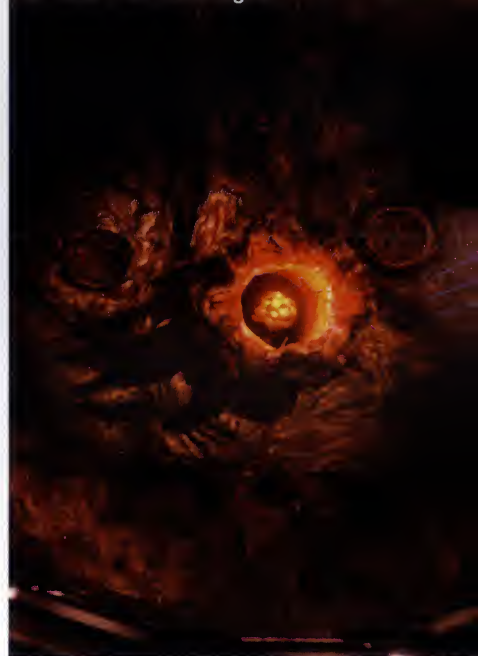
The third-person view is zoomed in tight over the shoulder of Clarke, similar to *RE5*. This design choice elicits a claustrophobic effect that has you cursing the narrow field-of-view whilst remaining fully aware that you're feeling as anxious and vulnerable as EA intended.

Cleverly, there's no HUD and instead

all the typical data is portrayed in-game. Clarke's back details his current health, while his clearly visible weapon glows with its remaining ammo count. Accessing your inventory brings up a holographic display in front of Clarke. The idea is to provide an internally consistent world thus enhancing your immersion, so there's no artificial pausing to change weapons or use a health kit.

Where *Dead Space* departs from genre conventions is where it becomes most interesting. Dismemberment is the key to combat and introduces a good deal of strategy to the manner in which you dispatch enemies. *Dead Space* distances itself from *RE5* by not only letting you move and shoot, it lets you use that movement as a crucial advantage. Shooting enemies in the legs will sever said limbs, restricting their capacity to

■ "Take THAT wall-vagina!"



INFO BYTE

EA are banking heavily on the success of *Dead Space*. Already in production is an animated movie to release later this year and a six-part comic series due early next year. Both media purport to tell the tale of events leading up to the start of the game.

pursue. They'll still attempt to crawl after you and, notably, many enemies have projectile-based attacks that emanate from their mouths, so you're never safe even after giving your foe a thorough knee-capping.

As a result, the enemies have to display a wider range of abilities and movement to sustain a meaningful challenge, especially when they begin mutating in the middle of a fight to account for the loss of a certain limb, and ultimately combat feels far more dynamic. Combat encounters tend to be quite prolonged and full of tactical expression. You're not mowing down hordes of zombies here; you're constantly forced to adjust your approach as the enemy adapts and the battlefield changes.

Expanding your repertoire of skills and abilities is vital to success. As Clarke is an engineer, he can utilise various workbenches around the Ishimura and use collectible 'nodes' to augment his space suit and many of his weapons.

This aspect introduces an RPG element to proceedings as you choose between upgrades: do you want to boost your health or the effectiveness of your gun? One decision may deny access to another so you're forced to make real choices that impact the way you'll be able to deal with future encounters and environments in the game.

"You're not mowing down hordes of zombies here; you're constantly forced to adjust your approach as the enemy adapts and the battlefield changes."

TOOLS OF THE TRADE



Like a sci-fi *MacGyver* – no, wait, that's *Stargate*. Whatever it is, *Dead Space* doesn't have you using conventional weaponry. Rather, all your tools are exactly that – tools. Clarke improvises his array of weapons from typical space station items – the Ishimura is a mining station, after all. Energy beams used to shear through solid rock are quite adept at doing the same to mutants, while a telekinesis device can quickly be repurposed from hauling boulders to hurling enemies.

Opting to increase the air capacity of your suit might seem like a good idea once you reach the various zero-gravity sections that take place in complete vacuum. If the previous areas of the station haven't already seduced you with their gloomy, menacing atmosphere, you'll thoroughly freak out once you step into the eerie quiet of a vacuum where the only aural accompaniment is Clarke's own breath. Silence has rarely sounded so terrifyingly lonely.

Of course, you're far from alone in this terrifying vacuum. Besides the numerous enemies, Clarke's got a whole crew accompanying him, two of whom are exploring the station with you – albeit in different areas as you swiftly become separated – and you stay in regular radio

communication with them throughout.

Beyond that, you learn much of what happened on the station via the numerous video and audio logs left behind by the missing crew. As in *BioShock*, you're almost playing archaeologist, uncovering the history of a place through such clues. It all serves to reinforce your feeling of isolation though – in that your crew and the previous crew are forever just out of reach.

Stretch your imagination just a little bit and it's easy to see something poetic in how the Ishimura itself represents the state of the survival horror genre. *Dead Space* is examining the rotten corpse, picking through it to discover what went wrong and offering new hope for the future. **David Wildgoose**



■ This screenshot is blue-a-ba-dee-a-ba-doo-a-ba-dee.

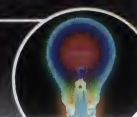


■ "It's not a weapon! Don't shoot! It's just a sponge man! Can't a deformed alien get a wash without getting light in his face, jeez!"

BOTTOM LINE

- Survival horror reinvented
- Ever-evolving enemies
- Oozing atmosphere

OPS is...
Fumbling for light



PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ **GENRE:** PARTY
■ **PLAYERS:** 1-4
■ **RELEASE:** LATE 2008
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** ACTIVISION
■ **DEVELOPER:** NEVERSOFT
■ **WEB:** www.neversoft.com

INFO BYTE

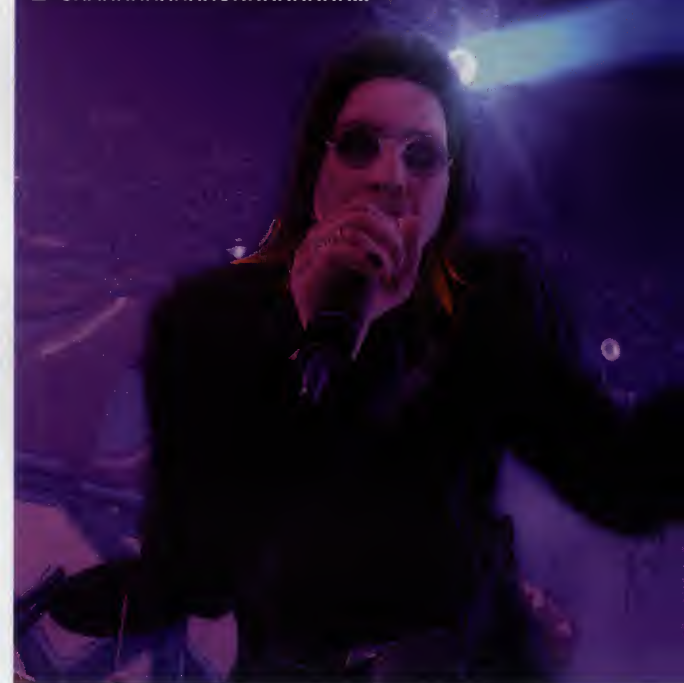
We NEED more eighties awesome in *Guitar Hero World Tour*. We want 'Hearts on Fire' from *Rocky IV*. We want a bearded Rocky montage: Rocky running up a mountain, Rocky doing upside down sit-ups. Give it to us!



■ "Hey dude, I've just noticed something. My arms are freakishly long... maybe I should see a doctor about that shit..."



■ "SHARRRRRRRONNNNNNN!!!"



GUITAR HERO WORLD TOUR

Rockin' all over the world

We've said it before, and we'll say it again (because we're boring like that) but this *Guitar Hero* vs. *Rock Band* extravaganza will undoubtedly be won and lost on the track list. Of course other features will aid and abet the eventual victor, but ultimately aspects of each franchise, such as equipment, additional features and the like, will be rendered null and void if either one of the two rhythm giants clearly has the better soundtrack of the two.

But sadly, for those finding it difficult to make a choice between these two rock

behemoths, as far as we can see, neither *GHWT* or *Rock Band 2* has the definitive soundtrack. At this stage, it seems very likely that your choice will simply come down to personal taste.

That being said, during our recent play test of *Guitar Hero World Tour*, we found ourselves pleasantly surprised by the ponderous amount of tracks available. It's safe to say that when asked to choose our first track to play we were completely spoilt for choice.

Thankfully, however, *World Tour* allows players to queue up to six tracks in

unison, meaning that you can create your own setlist and play through accordingly. After selecting 'Eye of the Tiger', 'Livin' on a Prayer' and a whole host of others, we were ready to rock, so to speak.

And rock we did.

INSTRUMENTAL

In many ways the *Guitar Hero* instruments themselves have been completely redesigned, retaining the basic concept (with the five buttons, and the whammy bar, etc) while expanding smartly in other areas. The guitars, for example, now

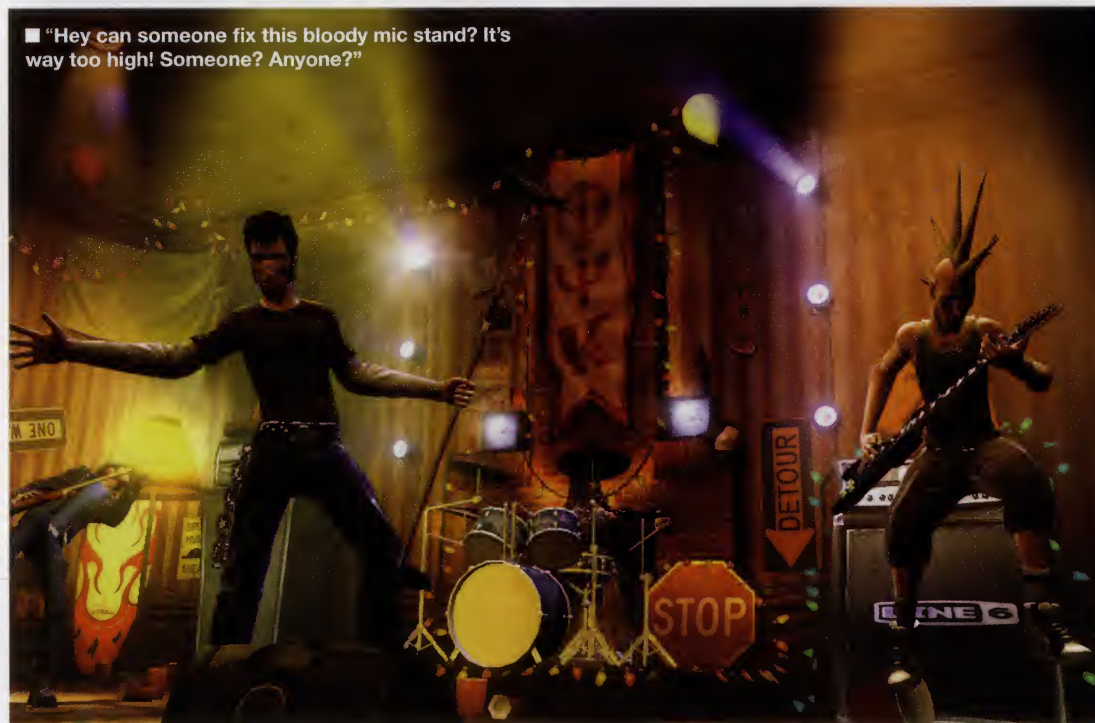
feature a flashy secondary fret-board that works on touch and *sliiiiide* – during some of the more flashy solos (such as the *Van Halen* effort on 'Beat It') it's possible to slide your finger and tap out the solos.

Another update concerns the bass – now players can play a sixth note by open strumming the bass (without holding down any button). Despite the fact that it completely threw us at first, it's a nice additional extra that adds increasingly more depth to a sadly overlooked aspect of the band dynamic.

Then we have the drums...



■ "Wait a minute... this isn't a mic. It's a collection of vintage chopsticks – what gives?"




■ "Hey can someone fix this bloody mic stand? It's way too high! Someone? Anyone?"

Having become rather accustomed to the simpler *Rock Band* drum kit, it took us a decent couple of songs before we got a handle on the different layout, and where everything was relative to the on-screen bar.

That being said, the drum kit is the one piece of equipment that outperforms *Rock Band* in most aspects. Whereas the *Rock Band* drum kit is a clackity clacking earbatter, the *World Tour* drum kit sounds and feels like you're tapping gently upon the buttocks of a new born child (not that we know what that sounds or feels like...). The drums have a softer, spongier feeling that reduces noise instantly, and it simply feels more natural. In short, it's far less toy-like than the *Rock Band* equivalent kit.

But there are issues – since *Guitar Hero World Tour* stops short of taking some of *Rock Band*'s more streamlined

innovations as their own (such as the brilliant drum fill system, and the way 'overdrive' is activated via 'screaming' into the mic), utilising 'star power' on instruments other than the guitar seems a little clumsy. While singing, for example, players must press  on the controller to use 'star power' – taking players directly out of the musical experience.

LET THERE BE ROCK

Countering this, however, with a thick layer of user created awesome sauce is the *Guitar Hero* studio and the all-new character creation modes. We've always been slightly sceptical with regards to the studio mode, and just how accessible it actually is – but the fact of the matter is that hardcore fans will undoubtedly spend hours creating their own masterpieces, and those who eventually tire of *World Tour*'s track list will download

these tracks, extending replay value exponentially.

In addition, the character creation mode is ridiculously in-depth, with a level of manipulation usually seen in games such as *The Sims*. Again, not every player will spend hour upon hour tweaking their character model, but the depth is there for those who choose to indulge.

In a similar manner to *LittleBigPlanet*, the community that Activision expect to spring up around *Guitar Hero World Tour* will be crucial to the game's success. As of right now both *Rock Band* and *GHWT* are essentially neck and neck in terms of tracklists and equipment, but new features such as the studio are undoubtedly Neversoft's trump card.

But will fans take to it? We don't know. The studio has an almost impenetrable depth to it, and until we've got our grubby mitts on the feature, we'll

ZE ARTISTES




Guitar Hero World Tour is absolutely *hoaching* with famous artists from the realm of rock, lending their name and likeness to the game. You might already know about Jimi Hendrix? But how about Travis Barker from *Blink 182*? Or the petite piece of ginger stuff Haley Williams from *Paramore*? How about the crown prince of darkness himself, Ozzy Osborne? That's just the beginning, apparently Activision have a few more rock gods up their sleeves. Watch this space people.



never really know just how easy or difficult it is to create your own tracks, but we're confident. Of course the creation itself will undoubtedly be niche, but the rest of us peons will no doubt find ourselves downloading the fruits of their labour.

But will this feature outweigh *Rock Band*'s huge backlog of downloadable content? Time will tell. ➤ **Mark Serrels**

BOTTOM LINE

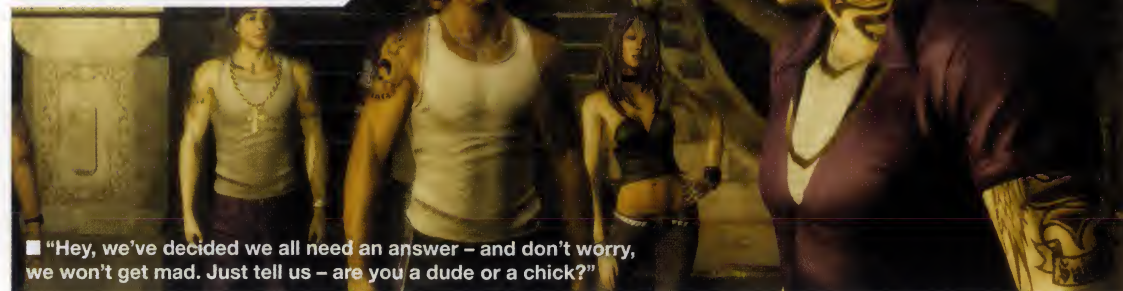
-  Awesome track list
-  New Instruments
-  Star Power...

OPS is...
Manowar...



PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ **GENRE:** OPEN WORLD
■ **PLAYERS:** TBA
■ **RELEASE:** OCTOBER 2008
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** THQ
■ **DEVELOPER:** VOLITION
■ **WEB:** www.saintsrow.com



■ "Hey, we've decided we all need an answer – and don't worry, we won't get mad. Just tell us – are you a dude or a chick?"

SAINTS ROW 2

The saints come marchin' in...

The original *Saints Row* was lucky. It was released before *GTA IV*. *Saints Row 2*? Sadly it won't have that luxury, and as such will probably suffer as a result of the comparison.

And while Volition themselves are often guilty of inviting such comparisons (re: their recent trailer – taking the piss out of how 'boring' *GTA* was), it's hard not to feel sorry for the franchise – especially as *Saints Row 2* really represents a solid attempt by Volition to move out of the imposing shadow of Rockstar's behemoth, and head off in a slightly different direction.

The major point of difference is the sheer depth of customisation – the range of choice is exhaustive to say the very least. Everything you'd expect in terms of physical representation is present and correct – you have the power to change absolutely every facet of your character's appearance.

But it was the incredible range of animations that players can ascribe to their characters that impressed us most with *Saints Row 2*. Aside from being able

to choose from a huge number of different taunts and compliments, choosing your actual walk, from a seemingly endless amount of varied swaggers really allows you to inject your own personality into a *Saints Row* character.

And as *GTA* made a conscious decision to drift towards reality in terms of story and function, *SR2* seems content to do the opposite, with a representation of violence that is completely hyper real.

The gameplay reflects that choice completely – everything feels lighter. Whereas Niko clambered weightily across the environment, your own personal *Saints Row* protagonist will feel a helluva lot more 'floaty'. Personally, we think the gameplays a bit too lightweight – but many will find it a far more accessible entry point into the open world genre.

As for the game mechanics themselves, they feel solid, if a little thin spread – there's very little you can't do in *Saints Row 2* (you can pick up mailboxes, and smack fools on the dome-piece, you can use enemies as human shields, etc) but conversely, there's very little about the

game that seems in-depth.

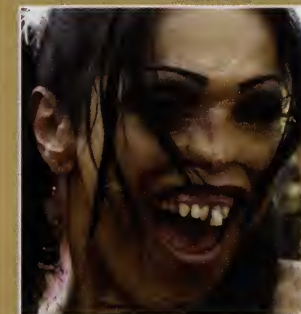
But regardless, *Saints Row 2* is fun. It might be stupid fun – but sometimes that's the best kind. It's plainly obvious that *Saints Row 2* won't be the game-changing experience that *GTA IV* was, but is that really a bad thing?

Saints Row 2 is the equivalent of a dumb popcorn movie – and, sure, everyone loves *Apocalypse Now* and *Platoon*, but is it really so wrong to also love *Commando*?

Hell no! *Commando* is a cinematic masterpiece, and we have similarly high hopes for *Saints Row 2*. **— Mark Serrels**

SIMPLY BEAUTIFUL

We truly wish you had been there, dear reader, to witness the genesis of our created character in *Saints Row 2*. Imagine, if ye dare, an Africa American woman of questionable gender, weighing over 400 pounds, sporting a comb-over of Norman Gunston proportions, and set of mutton chops more befitting of a cantankerous Victorian Judge. Now imagine said damsel clad in nothing but a bra and a set of hotpants. Yep. We went there alright – once you've seen it, you can't unsee it...



BOTTOM LINE

- Insane customisation
- Broad scope
- A bit thin spread

OPS is...

No saint

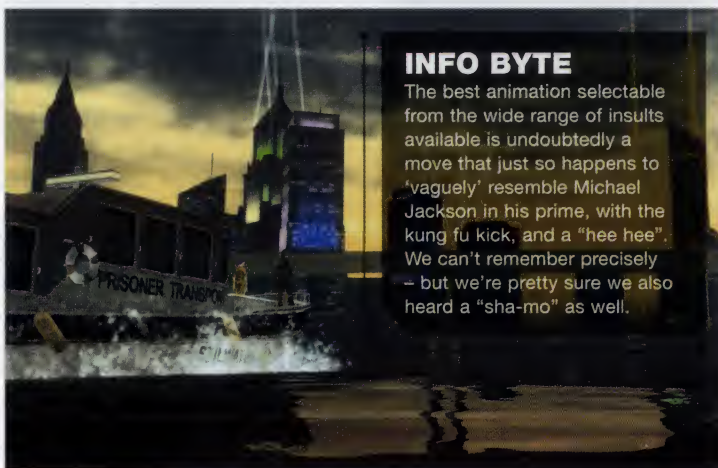


INFO BYTE

The best animation selectable from the wide range of insults available is undoubtedly a move that just so happens to 'vaguely' resemble Michael Jackson in his prime, with the kung fu kick, and a "hee hee". We can't remember precisely – but we're pretty sure we also heard a "sha-mo" as well.



■ She's covered in tomato sauce. Everyone! Get their chips! We're going to have a feast tonight



■ Insert 'get to the chawpa' caption here



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Fantasy
violence

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PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ **GENRE:** RPG
■ **PLAYERS:** 1-4
■ **RELEASE:** TBA
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** SEGA
■ **DEVELOPER:** ALFA SYSTEM
■ **WEB:** www.sega.com



■ "Argh. Numbers. Buttons. Japanese stuff!" (head explodes)

■ "Dinosaur-men: we wish they existed. We want to be one..."



PHANTASY STAR PORTABLE

Like chess, but with girls in mini skirts

This isn't the first time SEGA's legendary *Phantasy Star* RPG series has appeared on a handheld games machine (the Game Gear and Game Boy Advance both played host to decent-but-primitive *Phantasy Star* titles), but it's likely to set a new benchmark for the series away from its modern incarnation as a console – and PC – oriented MMORPG.

The first thing you'll notice is that *Phantasy Star Portable* looks absolutely fantastic. In spite of being developed outside of SEGA, at another Japanese company called Alfa System, it has all the visual charm of its older PS2-based sibling, *Phantasy Star Universe*.

It's not just a stripped-down remake of that game, though. It's actually more of a beefed up pseudo sequel, complete with entirely new adventures, albeit missing the online play. To compensate for the lack of an online world, *Portable* lets groups of *Phantasy Star* lovin' friends work through multiplayer specific missions in co-op. The multiplayer game supports up to four players via an Ad-hoc connection.

Even for veterans of *Phantasy Star Online* and *Universe*, there seems to be plenty here to keep players hooked. As well as the usual incentives wrapped up in obtaining new items and level-ups for your party members, there are multiple endings to be seen. Also, thanks to multiple choices offered at many points throughout the game, the adventure varies according to your decisions and style of play.

Those who like to see themselves in the middle of their Japanese RPG action will be pleased to find a fairly comprehensive character creation mode. As in *Universe*, this feature enables you to modify a base character until it looks something like you, choosing from dozens of faces, hairstyles and fashion accessories. You can then assign your newly-created character as one of three

basic player types – a Hunter, a Ranger or a Force – which has a bearing on the skills you can develop. It's even possible to change the proportions of your self-created character's body, which has enabled your correspondent to sort of replicate his beer gut in a mystical sci-fi setting. Nice!

Phantasy Star Portable's battle system should be familiar to *Universe* players. It's a real-time action setup, rather than a turn-based one, so you need to be nimble with the d-pad as much as humanly possible to consider strategy, item use and deployment of comrades throughout the course of the game.

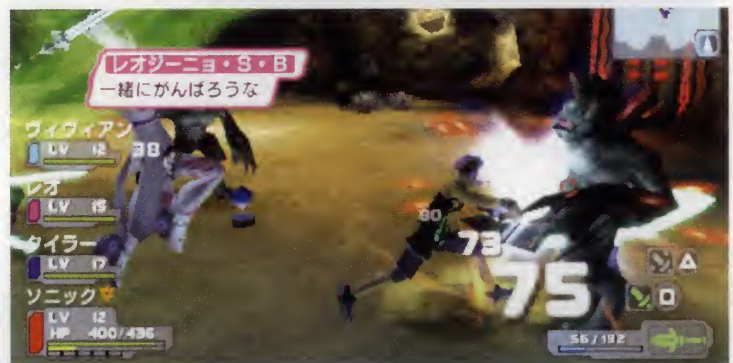
Timing is important too, as attacks and counters are most effective when you press buttons at the optimal moment. In multiplayer, the battles work particularly well because you can use the ancient art of conversation ("Stop arsing about and fire that rifle, mate!") to orchestrate your battle progress with friends.

Phantasy Star Portable seems to have what it takes to sit confidently alongside Square Enix' consistently strong PSP RPG output, but as yet the game isn't confirmed for a release in Australia. Still, it's unlikely that SEGA would leave such a high-profile game without an English translation, so we'd advise keeping an eye on SEGA's release schedule over the coming months. **Jonti Davies**

BOTTOM LINE

- Cool customisation
- Ad-hoc co-op
- It's not out yet!

OPS is...
Patiently waiting



INFO BYTE

There's a playable demo of *Phantasy Star Portable* available for download from the Japanese PlayStation Store. You'll need a fake Japanese address to get at it, though...

LEADER OF THE PACK

If you choose to play with friends as a group of adventurers in *Phantasy Star Portable*'s multiplayer mode, one player will need to take on the role of leader. The other members of the party aren't at any disadvantage, though. In fact, *Portable* is pretty fair when it comes to doling out bonuses among players – if one player finds a rare item that has been dropped during the course of battle, the whole team gets to acquire and benefit from it. It's a happy kind of democracy.



PlayStation®Portable



HE'S SUAVE AND SOPHISTICATED
HE KNOWS FINE WINES AND FAST CARS
WOMEN THROW THEMSELVES AT HIM
(YUP HE'S THE ONE ON THE RIGHT)

RATCHET IS IN PRISON FOR A CRIME HE DIDN'T COMMIT, CLANK'S NOW TAKEN THE LEAD;
IS RATCHET DOOMED? THE RATCHET AND CLANK FRANCHISE IS BACK,
BUT WITH A SPY THEMED TWIST. PACKING A DEVASTATING SELECTION OF NEW WEAPONS AND GADGETS,
AND DRESSED TO IMPRESS. WILL CLANK RISE TO THE OCCASION TO SAVE HIS FRIEND?



PG

Mild Violence

Levelling the Playing Field

By Dylan Burns

Gaming consoles do not exist in a vacuum. Today's manufacturers, the makers of the next-gen platforms, are almost unashamedly unafraid of borrowing (perhaps 'stealing' is too harsh a word) any idea from their competitors that works.

When it comes to in-game unlockables and rewards, we know that the Xbox 360 had Achievements first. For many gamers this system has provided countless hours of extra enjoyment as they wring every last point out of each title in their collection. Although Microsoft can be credited with paving the way for Achievement recognition, the recent implementation of Trophies on the PS3 offers a potentially exciting new approach to player interaction.

In short, much like Achievements,

Trophies add an extra layer to your games. Having observed Microsoft's points-based system, Sony now has the opportunity to take the ball and run with it.

THE HOOK

Achievements hook you in by providing a constant feedback loop – through the repeated accrual of points, all of them contributing to one big, meaningless Gamerscore. Achievements also encourage competitive play by offering the ability to compare your score for each game with that of players from all over the world.





It's not uncommon for people to purchase a game simply because it coughs up an easy 1,000 points, and the internet is full of tips and tricks on how to get easy points and build your Gamerscore up to dizzying heights. The problem with all this is that your score means absolutely nothing. It has no monetary value. Points can't be traded in for anything, and there's no guarantee that you'll even keep your points tally come the day that the next Microsoft console gets released.

Trophies have exploded onto the scene with Sony knowing that they need to offer something different. For PS3 owners, the element of pride that comes from beating games and getting every Trophy remains, but the system is less about the overall score and more about how you are succeeding as a gamer.

Your level increases in relation to the types of accomplishments that you achieve in-game, rather than assigning a

number value to each one. Gold Trophies will require real stamina and fortitude and thus be worth more to your level. Whereas silver and bronze Trophies will be easier to get, yet not level you up as quickly. As for platinum Trophies, well they'll only be unlocked if you get every other Trophy in the game.

A NEW ERA

As we write this, Trophy support in games is still sporadic. We guess we could whine about how Sony needs to make sure that every new game gets Trophies, but instead we're going to don our 'look to the future' hat and think about how this new system can actually strengthen the relationship between gamers and developers.

The fact that Trophies are a fair bit different to Gamerpoints, particularly with their tier-like structure, shows that Sony is committed to distancing themselves from their main competitor. If they were to simply offer the exact same system as seen on the 360, next-gen players would be loath to swap systems, thus eschewing



Games that need Trophies ASAP



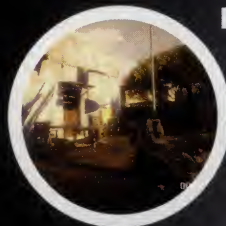
Metal Gear Solid 4

It's almost a given that we'd pick this game first, but it's just so ripe for Trophy accomplishments. A gold Trophy would definitely be awarded for passing the game without kills and/or alerts. But we've also got some other suggestions: 'Spank the Monkey' (when Drebin's back is turned, give that annoying monkey of his a smack across the mouth for being so damn pretentious), 'Smokin' Baby' (smoke 1000 ciggies in a playthrough, making sure you dispose of them responsibly), 'Wakey Wakey Hands Off Snakey' (successfully sit through every cut scene without falling asleep).



Grand Theft Auto 4

Rather than just copy across the 360 version's Achievements, we've got our own ideas about how this masterpiece should cough up its Trophies, if it ever gets a patch: 'Hit and Run' (successfully splatter over 2000 litres of pedestrian blood, with 2x multipliers for hitting homeless and/or old people in any vehicle), 'I Heff Dat' (in any mission, actually have something that the person wants, without having to drive all the way to the other side of the island and back for them), 'Legless' (shoot the legs out from under 50 hapless citizens... because it's so bloody funny to watch Euphoria in action).



Battlefield: Bad Company

An action-packed romp in search of elusive gold; what better platform to attach a few Trophies to? Here are a few ideas: 'Yee-Haw' (put up with the redneck dialogue for the entire game), 'There's Gold in Them Thar Hills' (find one of the gold ingots, realise that it's too hard to find them all and then say 'F**k this!' into the headset loudly), 'Tanks For Being Useless' (blow your entire team to smithereens twenty times as payback for them being absolutely no help whatsoever throughout the entire game).



LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures

Our missive to Traveller's Tales with Trophy suggestions will read something like this: 'Whip It Good' (unlock the hidden sex mini-game featuring Indy, a bowl of nachos, an entire women's netball team and, of course, Indy's whip), 'My Beating Heart' (during the ceremony in *The Temple of Doom*, successfully align Harrison Ford's pacemaker with the rhythm of the poor victim's exposed heart), 'Chock-a-Block' (feed those pesky monkeys so many bananas that they explode in a shower of sticky plastic bits).



Assassin's Creed

A lot of people loved it, others hated it. Whatever your predilection, the inclusion of Trophies might give this game a new lease on life; accomplishments should include the following: 'Split Personality' (misjudge the gap between a building and have the resultant fall break at least half of Altair's bones), 'Get a Job' (take one of those pesky beggars by the scruff of the neck, march them to a job agency and help them gain employment as a Jerusalem tourist guide), 'Nice Move Desmond' (after a long day in the Animus, pull some smooth moves on Lucy and get her to agree to bring you dinner in your cell/room).

their already built-up Gamerscore. Trust us, 360 gamers have a real attachment to those magical numbers.

So too should PS3 owners develop an attachment to their Trophy collection. One way that this could be done is by offering PS3 players the ability to give feedback on what kinds of in-games accomplishments they most enjoy. This could be monitored secretly by developers as they watch to see which Trophies seem to be gained the most.

An alternative, and something that we'd love to see trialed, is a system where developers and publishers help to reward players who consistently achieve a high number of Trophies. This could work through offering competition entries to those players that are above certain levels – or perhaps something like a Trophy Weekend, where players who amass a particular amount of Trophies in certain games qualify for prizes.

Another way to strengthen the player-developer bond is to let gamers have a say in the types of Trophies they'd like included in upcoming releases. This needn't be for all of the game's accomplishments, but surely developers could set aside a handful for each title and throw it open to public debate. It may or may not work, but it would be nice to see one developer have a go at something completely different.

MIRROR IMAGE

We've already stated that Sony needs to distance itself from Achievements in order to offer something that appeals to both new and loyal PS3 owners. Another way to do this is to make sure that the Trophies that are available in cross platform releases are completely different to the Achievement offered with the 360 release.

When a game comes out on both platforms, the easy (read: lazy) thing to do would be to simply copy and paste (yes, this is a generalisation of what we're certain is a complicated process) the Achievement descriptions across to the PS3 version and voila – you have your Trophy system for the game.

We want to see some originality for cross-platform games. Not only will totally unique Trophies for these games allow PS3 owners to differentiate themselves from the 360 crowd, but it may even provide a purchase incentive for the hardcore fan to buy both versions – and that's an argument that publishers are sure to love!

TAKE ME HOME

Home is coming! The wait has been long, but the Beta is underway and we'll hopefully be rewarded with a launch date soon. When *home* hits we will





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PG

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FEATURE

PS3 Trophy system

finally be able to show off our Trophies in a completely different way, via the Trophy Room. This is where you'll keep all your Trophies and totally show them off to your online mates. We predict that, come *home*'s release, those empty spaces where Trophies should sit in your collection will elicit some epic gaming marathons in order to fill them poste-haste.


We won't know until it's released, but we honestly hope that *home* can deliver in its bid to bring PS3 owners together in a community setting. Part of this success will hinge on how much weight gamers put on comparing themselves with other players, perusing others' Trophy collections, getting green with envy and making a promise to come back to gloat once they've snagged a few extra accomplishments.

Beyond this, and we're speculating very heavily, imagine if having platinum Trophies in certain games eventually gave you bonuses for your avatar or home apartment. It would be seven shades of awesome to stroll up to a group of buddies in *home* wearing a Big Boss shirt, or a *Resistance 2* cap, or – you get the idea, it would be extremely cool. We'd definitely swallow our pride and roll with the virtual Barbie approach to avatars if Trophies unlocked interesting, geeky accoutrements in this way.

PLAYING TO WIN

For Trophies to be something totally kick-arse, there needs to be an agreement between all games developers to follow particular allocation patterns. Every 360 owner knows that 1,000 is a number to aim for, but at the moment PS3 players are more than a little bit confused when it comes to knowing exactly how many trophies are available in each game, how many are gold, how many are silver and bronze, and so on.

Similarly, a player's level goes up with Trophies earned, but again this runs the risk of becoming another meaningless number. Stating that you're Level 10 has no real meaning if reaching Level 10 doesn't have some attendant reward, unlock or online recognition. Even something as small as being listed on a game's official website, like Rockstar's Social Club, has potential. If you keep that carrot dangling in front of people they'll keep on accruing particular honours in their quest to be the best.

With any luck, Sony's Trophy system will become a robust and highly appreciated part of playing on the PS3. At this point in time, Trophies could either bloom beautifully or wilt into a pale version of Achievements. Let's hope it's the former and not the latter; if Trophies are done properly the incentive to get every last one might just take over our lives. Bring on the challenge! 



What the Future Holds

As mentioned in the main text, it will be great once the Trophy system is implemented across the board, but at this point in time we're only seeing a handful of games utilise them. Current games that support Trophies include *PixelJunk Eden*, *Super Stardust HD* and *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*. So there are a few titles to keep you busy.

Sony has stated that all games will support Trophies... eventually. So for now you'll have to be content with the following list of upcoming games that will allow you to plug in and level up:

- BUZZ Quiz TV
- LittleBigPlanet
- Motorstorm: Pacific Rift
- NBA 09
- Resistance 2
- SOCOM Confrontation





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PG

Mild Themes
and Violence.

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WHEN IT RAINS, IT POURS!

No longer just a tech demo, *Heavy Rain*: The Origami Killer starts to make waves with its playable film sequences. **Words: Vanessa Morgan**

Watching eyes flicker across a screen for 15 minutes, as they draw circles and wrinkle a little, would rarely keep a room of grown men fascinated. The extreme close-up is unflattering, showing every freckle, line and skin blemish, yet everyone is transfixed. Why is this girl so alluring? She's pretty, but no Jenna Jameson or Jessica Alba – there is no promise of a romantic interlude and she hasn't spoken a word.

The reason so many are mesmerised is simple – she isn't real.

French studio Quantic Dream has hidden their latest project tightly behind closed doors, since they first let us glance at a tech demo of *Heavy Rain* back in 2006, a demo known simply as 'The Casting'.

The studio's emphasis on the project is hard to miss – *Heavy Rain* is a Hollywood-worthy production. Heavily story-driven,

its mission is to capture the imagination of the player, rendering them more than just a simple button masher or spectator to the rolling cutscenes.

CASTING COUCH

The Casting starts out with a very basic white room. Watching through the viewfinder, a girl enters the room. Visibly uncomfortable, she shuffles from foot to foot as she enters, before sitting down on a stool and delivering a monologue.

It is immediately apparent that the room has been stripped to show just how much detail has been put into this character. As the camera zooms in on her body parts she talks to the camera and while the facial structure and her mouth seem somewhat off, it is a remarkable demo. However, with Quantic Dream's motion capture studio playing a large part in film and videogame

production, it is not totally surprising that they could produce adequate movement and expression.

Two years on and the new face lighting up our world goes way beyond what most could ever perceive as possible in a videogame. It's not just that this face looks realistic, but the fact that, unlike many game characters, the eyes engage with objects surrounding the character.

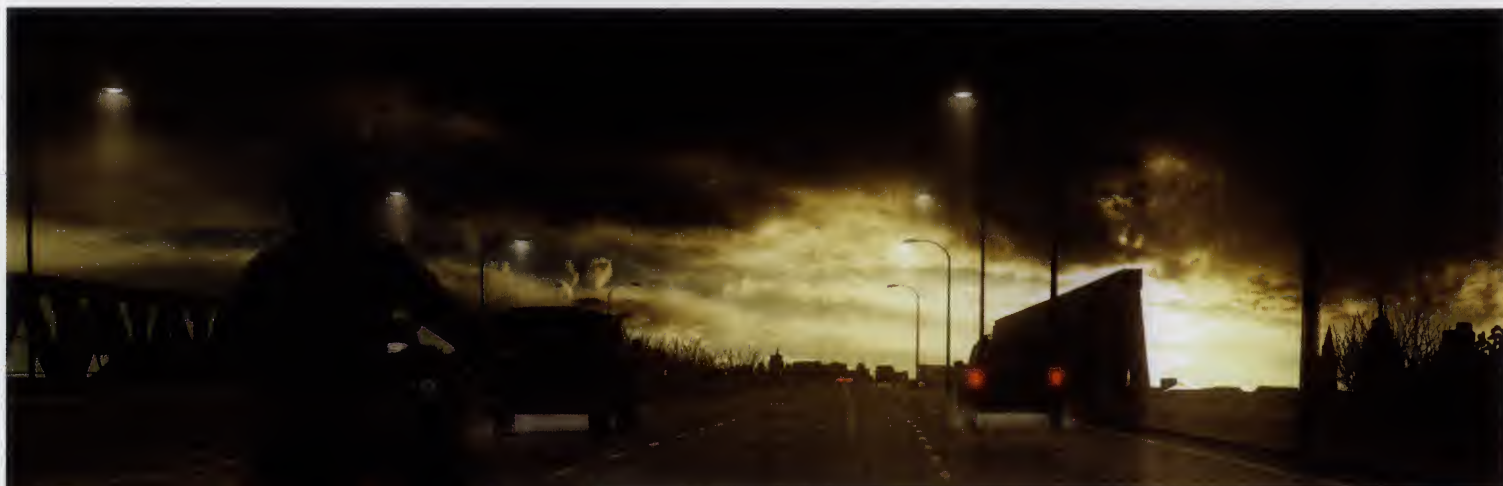
While many characters seem to merely *look* in a direction, you can tell that eye contact is being made. It's a tangible leap forward in technology and the way we engage with games.



“It's a tangible leap
forward in technology
and the way we engage
with games...”

FEATURE

Heavy Rain



■ Follow this example – always wear a helmet. Safety first, better safe than sorry, look before you leap, etc...

■ Only one person turned up to Jimmy's surprise party. At least she was kinda hot...



STEPPING UP

While a total flop, losing nearly \$100 million for Square Pictures and ultimately shutting them down, the technology behind a film like *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* was not just visually striking, but also revolutionised sound, as it was the first to include an eight-channel Sony SDDS soundtrack, a move that would go on to influence animated films that followed. Imagine how much, and how quickly, this might have happened in the anime world if the film had been a success.

Technology is the adhesive that enables companies to push gaming forward; we're forever fascinated by what engine a game will be produced on, what steps have been made to ensure the AI doesn't leave a member of your troop walking into a tree, how many mutated zombies can fit on the screen at once and, of course, will it hit the magical 60 frames per second benchmark?

With more developers leading with PS3 as their primary development console, like *Mirror's Edge*, or signing on exclusively for the PS3, such as *Heavy Rain*, we hope that the cell processor's strengths and potential capabilities will provide us with more than just crisp textures.

TEMPERATURE RISING

Fahrenheit, Quantic Dream's successful paranormal thriller of 2005, was a title that focused on decision making, with each new choice opening up a story arc in the unfolding mystery. The combination of motion capture technology and unconventional gameplay branded the game as an 'interactive film' as opposed to an action or adventure game.

It's obvious from the outset that David Cage, founder of Quantic Dream, gathers inspiration from film. Having once described *Heavy Rain* as "a very dark film noir thriller with mature themes", his emphasis is on telling the story as you play through, instead of simple cutscenes.

Heavy Rain throws away the convention of "a bit of story, then action, then a bit of story, then action" – like *Fahrenheit* it will have event triggers that you play through.

Redesigning genres and opening gaming up to a broader experience than guys with guns and girls with humongous breasts has always been a focus for the company's founder. Quantic Dream instead aim to create compelling characters that have a personal tale to tell – characters that you'll relate to on a personal level.

BONUS

Not wanting to destroy the experience of *Heavy Rain*, nor give too much away

about the thriller's story, David Cage led us through a rather creepy bonus scene from the game. At first what looked to be a simple cutscene (which they were so vehemently against in the first place) quickly became recognisable as good old gameplay. Thank the good lord!

It started off basic – the female protagonist, the owner of the mesmerising eyes from the first tech demo, simply walked up and down the street.

Using the left analogue stick to turn, she would first move her head in the direction with her body following in a fluid movement as she turned left or right. Walking up to a house on a suburban street, the detail, with no loading or popping, is absolutely impeccable. Trees sway in the rain, droplets trickling down her face bounce off the brown leather jacket in real time. Everything seems perfectly flawless.

Approaching the door, the right analogue stick is used to carry out actions. Knocking by tapping the stick left or ringing the bell by a quick tap right. When neither of these presses attain a response, a soft jab of the SIXAXIS controller in a specific

direction delivers the line "Mr White" or, by lifting the controller, a quick "hello". With all options exhausted, our super snoop moves around to the side of the house.

Desperate to enter the house, a slightly ajar window offers up an opportunity. Pushing a barrel up against the house, the right analogue stick, once again comes into play as she can choose to slowly winch the window slowly moving the stick or hoist it open with a quick movement.

But of course each action will have consequences in this game. The player can access the character's thoughts, weighing out the pros and cons of each action, deciding on how cautious or daring they want to be and how this may influence future actions. With decisions making up the core of the gameplay, this "bendable story" feels like a 'choose your own adventure' story brought to life.

Inside the house we discover more about Mr White – obviously not at home, the taxidermist's life is up for exploration. Objects take up space and have weight, like most games you can pick up objects, sit on the brown stained couch and use

items. All seems clear till you open the door to the bathroom and discover a bath filled with a mangled collection of body parts, undeniably female.

Utterly repulsive, a little too real, it throws in a fascinating twist in what started off as little more than gathering clues. In a second room are women. The taxidermist has been busy. Posed in seductive and alluring settings, draped across a bed or dressing, they're ready for play. The only problem is they're corpses – stuffed, mounted and completely lifeless.

Of course it doesn't stop there, and this is where the game comes into its own. Mr White returns. Most would get the hell out of there at top speed, searching for a path away from the front door to avoid getting caught. Those that have explored the house thoroughly will be able to work out the quickest route to escape, others will find themselves stuck and will need to hide. In situations like this, as in shows like *24*, the screen will split. You'll be able to move the character around while watching the predator move around. Escaping will come down to timing, if you forget about

the creaking floor you could have a race on your hands and inevitably a fight for your survival ahead.

And, as with every decision made in *Heavy Rain*, the micro movements are what makes the difference.

The things you do when you talk, just moving your head a little bit, your eyes lighting up when something strange is noticed in the distance – these are aspects that will define *Heavy Rain*.

THE DREAM

Taking ordinary people and throwing them into extraordinary situations has become Quantic Dream's signature. *Heavy Rain* will see four different characters put in the spotlight, forcing them to decide on what is good and what is evil. With the narrative going deeper and probing harder than what we've come to expect from videogames, Ethan Mars, Scott Shelby, Madison Paige and Norman Jayden aren't going to find it easy as they discover how far they are prepared to go to save someone they love.

We undoubtedly look forward to coming face to face with *The Origami Killer*. ▀

■ Dammit – where's the tin opener? I'm going to have to use this stupid knife again...



they discover how far they are prepared to go to save someone they love...



UNCANNY VALLEY

You may not have heard of it, but you may have experienced it! Uncanny valley is a theory that when we see robots or representations of the human form that look or act as if they were actual humans, we experience a kind of repulsion.

The 'valley' is the dip in the positivity graph. When something is almost human we are said to get a feeling of strangeness, which can turn people off an experience – such as with films like *Polar Express*, *Beowulf* or even *Final Fantasy: The Spirit Within*.

The big question is: Will making videogames that are heavy on the realism turn gamers away?

It's hard to tell whether controlling someone that looks like a real person will heighten the emotion or turn us off the experience all together. *Heavy Rain* looks to put this theory to the test.





PG

Mild violence

MA 15+
RESTRICTED

Strong violence

The following games are rated PG and MA15+

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IT'S A SMALL WORLD AFTER ALL...

WORDS: MARK SERRELS



A

s videogaming slowly emerges from the dark rooms of the nerdtacular minority into the mainstream, the inevitable has seemingly occurred – gaming has become bloated, uninspired and soulless. Production costs have spiralled out of control, and development teams now number in the faceless hundreds.

Thus, with an ever growing population of gamers to court, the production of videogames is no longer a labour of love, rather the combination of millions of man hours, glued and stuck together into templated shooters/racers/fighters/RPGs, fit for public consumption by the many. Soulless... uninspired, and utterly, utterly bland.

Thankfully, there is an antidote, there is a cure. If you would only partake in it, create with it, play with it, maybe together we can change gaming. That antidote is **LittleBigPlanet**.





■ "Yarr. I'm a skeleton with an actual eye in his socket. Yarr. I'm a freak of skeleton nature..."



■ "Great, we're in Germany. Let's get some chocolate and waffles!"
"That's Belgium you idiot!"



B

ecause *LittleBigPlanet* is not a generic shooter/racer/fighter/RPG, it *isn't* being developed by a team numbered in the hundreds – it's *not* the combination of millions of man hours.

It is a labour of love. Created by a small team of 30 at Media Molecule, *LBP* is like the gaming equivalent of punk rock. Whereas other games seem content to dress up simple game mechanics like mutton as lamb, and present it as something new, Media Molecule have done the opposite – stripping down gaming to its bare essentials and giving everyone the tools to create their own experience.

LittleBigPlanet is a true original. The 'create' section may mimic certain games (titles that feature level editors, for example), but never has a developer been bold

enough to present the tools *themselves* as the game. Speaking to the *LittleBigPlanet* product manager Nick Robinson, he made a bold statement – claiming that when the game is released, we'll find that *creating* in *LBP* will ultimately be far more rewarding and fun than *playing* the game itself.

But in many ways the division is irrelevant, it's almost impossible to separate the 'play' from the 'create' and vice versa – the lines are deliberately blurred. Thankfully Sony gave us a chance to partake in *LittleBigPlanet*'s 'create' mode, and the results were... well, let's just give you a couple of examples.

NO TICKET

One member of our group, to make things simple let's just call him Jeffrey. All Jeffrey wanted was to create a "big-ass Zeppelin". So he did, out of sponge – one of the lightest materials in the game. Then he put



NO CHEATING

Something we found extremely interesting during our extensive hands on with *LBP* was this: our Media Molecule rep claimed that every single playable level that will eventually ship with *LittleBigPlanet* on launch has been created solely with the 'create' function players will have access to upon release. In other words, players could, if they chose, create any single one of the Media Molecule levels from scratch if they so desired. Apparently the development team used the catchphrase "no cheating", insisting that anything they could create, could essentially be made by the community they hope to inspire.



■ "Hey man, where did the Chief, and the biker dude go - has the Village People juggernaut finally come to a halt?"



a rocket on the back of said Zeppelin, and a lever inside the Zeppelin that turned on the rocket.

To cut a long story short, when Sackboy got inside the enormous sponge Zeppelin and pulled the lever, the rocket launched the sponge monstrosity into orbit instantly, as Sackboy gripped on for dear life inside. The level was the equivalent of a Zeppelin-sized bucking bronco - how long could Sackboy keep his grip in this twisting, tumultuous pile of sponge before he was flung, careening towards the concrete floor and his untimely doom?

Another level, created by yours truly, had Sackboy jumping up a seemingly endless amount of platforms, all the while encouraged by handmade characters informing him that a 'great' reward awaited him if he would only climb a few more steps. Once Sackboy reached the top, we created a final message - "take a leap of

faith, to claim your reward". Little do the poor bastards playing the game realise that the only thing that awaits them at the bottom is a giant pile of dog shit, 'created', nay excreted, by us.

Yep. Good times.

So truly, *LBP* does give you free reign - to a certain extent your imagination is essentially your only boundary.

Note - we said "a certain extent".

TOOLS OF DESTRUCTION

Because if you want to be truly proficient in the 'create' section of *LittleBigPlanet* you will have to get to grips with the tools put up - and while they are pretty user friendly, they do provide an initial barrier. At this stage they aren't quite as user friendly as we would have liked.

After entering into the 'create' mode, the main gateway to creativity is the 'Popit' - a menu players can open through their

Sackboy avatar.

From here you can choose to create objects, proximity triggers, music, enemies, pits of death - pretty much anything your sordid little imagination can conjure up.

Choosing a material, and placing it throughout your level, is essentially the easy part, and for most this will be the base introduction to the 'create' experience. During a brief demo, we watched as a short level was built before our eyes, complete with musical cues and simple game mechanics. 20 to 30 minutes later the level was totally playable, and worked with no issues whatsoever.

But the major question is - and this is the crux upon which the entirety of

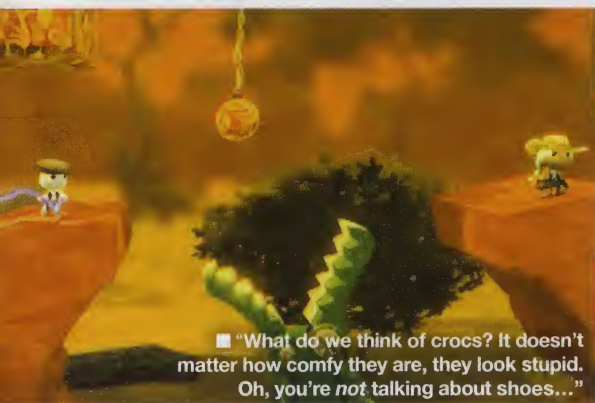


LittleBigPlanet's appeal is balanced - just how accessible is this 'create' mode? Is it possible for newbies to pick up a controller and start building at the drop of a hat?



CREATIONISTS

Believe it or not, Media Molecule actually considered selling *LittleBigPlanet* as a downloadable PSN game, with absolutely zero levels, and only the 'create' tools. In fact, most at Media Molecule feel that the levels are almost inconsequential compared to the 'create' aspect of the game. The single player campaign apparently only exists to help players learn how to use the 'create' mode correctly.



■ "What do we think of crows? It doesn't matter how comfy they are, they look stupid. Oh, you're *not* talking about shoes..."

■ If Mary Poppins made a game, sprinkled it with fairy dust and then let Santa Claus wipe his arse with it, that game would be *LittleBigPlanet*.



HIRED ON THE SPOT

When asked if Media Molecule would be watching the user created levels for new talent, our rep replied "absolutely". Apparently a member of the team has already been hired as the result of a beta undertaken in the UK. Supposedly some of the more completely 'off-the-wall' levels are his handiwork. Can't wait to try some of those bad boys out.



The answer to that question is... hmm, we're not quite sure yet.

Because after a 60 minute demonstration of the controls, we were given an hour and a half to create our very own level from scratch, and at the end of that time only half of the group managed to actually create a functioning level, while others crashed and burned in the process. Many of these failures were the result of an overly ambitious initial concept, but others failed due to fiddly controls that needed just a little refining.

We couldn't, for example, after 20 minutes of trying, create a simple swinging rope for Sackboy to traverse. Something we initially thought would be child's play, actually turned out to be logistically tough. With two designers co-operatively, the menu system often became confusing as both designers attempted to create in unison.

But regardless of the teething problems, we were ultimately amazed at just how accessible the whole creation mode was. In addition, the Media Molecule rep promised that the very act of playing

through *LBP*'s campaign mode will help teach you how to create on the fly. The concept is that, by the time you've finished playing, you'll be positively itching to create your own innovative gameplay experiences.

POTENTIAL RISK


But ultimately, with *LittleBigPlanet* it's all about potential – but with that potential comes a certain amount of risk, because Media Molecule are taking a huge gamble on a community that essentially doesn't exist yet. Sure, a certain amount of people will take to *LBP* like ducks to water, but will it be enough to sustain the community this game undoubtedly deserves?

We certainly hope so, but Media Molecule are absolutely banking on it. According to our rep, the team already has the next 12 months of downloadable content mapped out, whether it be free downloadable maps, new design elements (fully functioning water was discussed) – even commissioning other Sony first parties to create all-new levels is a

possibility (although at this stage totally unconfirmed).

The possibilities are, quite literally, endless, but over and above anything Media Molecule create for consumption we simply can't wait to see what Joe Public creates with this brilliantly executed set of tools. In many ways that will be the true test of the 'create' mode, and *LittleBigPlanet* as a whole. The community that will inevitably spring up around this game will ultimately be an inseparable part of the *LBP* package, and at this stage, minus that community, it's almost impossible to judge the game.

In short, *LittleBigPlanet* will ultimately become whatever we, as a community, make it. For now the game is simply a brilliantly designed set of tools, but the precise, exact moment *LBP* is released, it will be the gateway to an original, fresh gaming experience never before encountered on console.

The real beauty of *LittleBigPlanet* is this: we ain't seen nothin' yet. 





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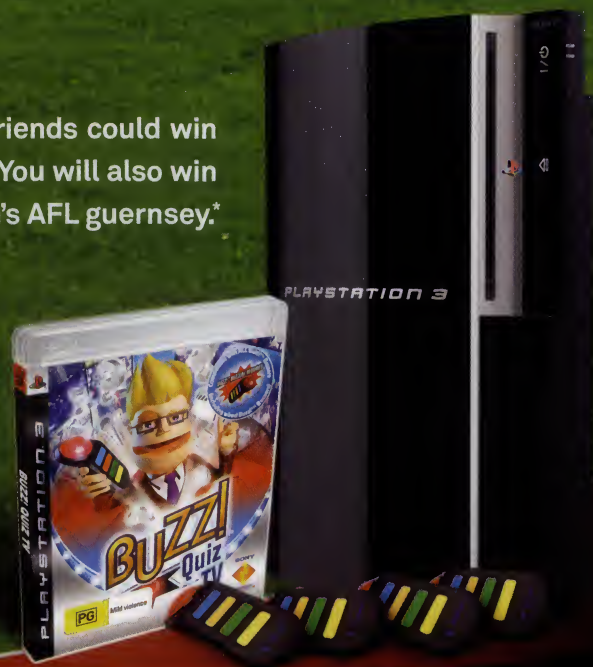
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PG

Mild violence



This is living

PLAYSTATION 3

FEATURE

Final Fantasy XIII Interview



XIII

Three versions, one game title, Square Enix discusses the Crystal mythology of ***Final Fantasy XIII***.

WORDS: Vanessa Morgan

Knocked for the random battles, 'girlie' lead characters and some ridiculous plot twists, the *Final Fantasy* series is more than just a battle against technology held together by a recurring character called Cid.

Corporate Executive Shinji Hashimoto and Producer Yoshinori Kitase will once again bring together a diverse party of heroes as they prepare to launch *Final Fantasy XIII*.

OPS: Was there a base the story sprang from for *Final Fantasy XIII*?

Yoshinori Kitase: The base of all the *Final Fantasy XIII* stories is the Crystal mythology. This is kind of like Greek mythology in real life, there are Gods that come into play with the crystals and there is a myth that exists in the world, of the game. It is not part of the actual world but there are things named after it and artifacts that exist in the world based on the mythology. This is what connects all *FFXIII* titles.

Shinji Hashimoto: With each of the *Final Fantasy XIII* titles, including *Agito* and

Versus, all three titles are based on the Crystal mythology, the Directors of each title have interpreted it in their own way and they were very free in story and game style. They are connected by that myth, but otherwise the three games are very different experiences.

OPS: Will Lightning take the lead through the story?

Kitase: Lightning, the female pictured in the trailers – her name is not actually Lightning but she was called Lightning – she will be the main character. Of course there might be other characters that will take the lead in other parts of the story away from Lightning. So they'll be featured as if they are the main focus of the scene in that sense, but Lightning will be the overall main focus.

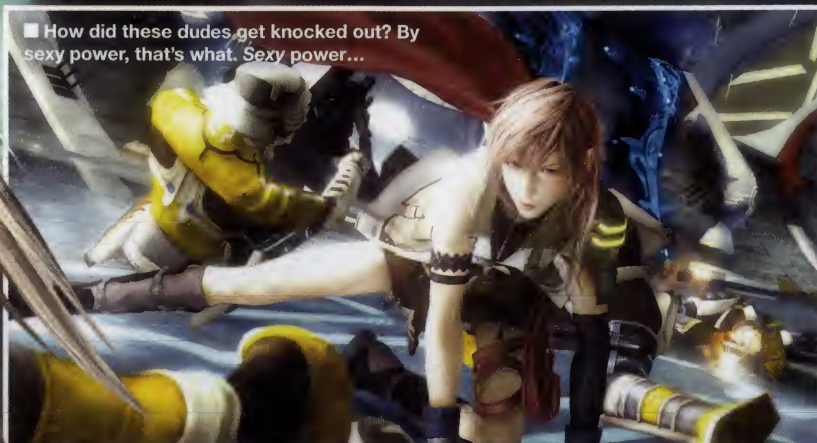
OPS: How did you decide to choose a female character to lead *FFXIII*?

Kitase: In the past there have been female characters in a 'semi' lead position, for example in *FFVI* (Terra) and in *FFX* (Yuna). They weren't quite the main lead so in a sense we



FEATURE

Final Fantasy XIII Interview



■ How did these dudes get knocked out? By sexy power, that's what. Sexy power...



"We don't want PS3 owners to be disappointed in any way. It's not that we are cancelling or delaying the PS3 version in any way..."

wanted to give it a try, have a female character in the main position, and face the challenges of creating a story around her.

OPS: So far we haven't seen much of the party structure. Will other members join Lightning, or will this signal a change for the series?

Kitase: While we can't tell you exactly how many will be in your party now, but we will have a traditional party element incorporated. Gameplay wise there's not much we can disclose at the moment except for the fact that, similar to *Final Fantasy XII*, there will be a field with monsters roaming. The character can attack them, and they have AI capabilities so

you can dodge them or go towards them on the field and once you attract them it will go into a battle scene. That's the flow of the battles in *Final Fantasy XIII*.

OPS: Will *Final Fantasy XIII* be more science fiction or fantasy based this time round?

Kitase: Whether the game is more sci-fi or fantasy based is something that the team decides very early on in development and with *Final Fantasy X* it had more of a fantasy feel to it. The team behind *Final Fantasy XIII* is the team that worked on *X*, this is their next project after *X* and since that was fantasy they wanted to go towards a more sci-fi feel.

OPS: Does the introduction of the 360 version mean a delay for PlayStation owners?

Kitase: We will be completing the PS3 version first before we move on to the next, we'll burn them onto the Blu-ray disc before moving on and that's where we are right now.

OPS: Do you think that PS3 owners will be disappointed with the announcement?

Hashimoto: We don't want PS3 owners to be disappointed in any way. It's not that we are cancelling or delaying the PS3 version in any way, it's still right on schedule for development.

Kitase: Because it is coming to two platforms there might be some fans that are worried it may become generic, so that it will fit onto both consoles, but the PS3 version is what is in development right now and the team is looking to specialise it for the PS3 so that the game is maximised, and then they will port it over to the 360 and fully utilise the capabilities of that console. We're trying to use the hardware to the max for both consoles, so there will be no decrease in quality with it going to both platforms.

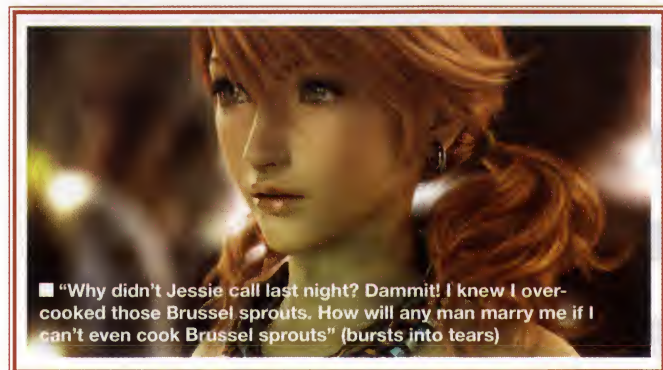
OPS: And how is your relationship with Sony these days?

Hashimoto: The friendly relationship between Sony and Square is unchanged. Plus there are the upcoming PSP titles, so there is more

relationship strengthening there. It is unchanged. We look forward to *Dissida*.

OPS: As the series takes the jump to the next generation, what has been the most significant change in development?

Kitase: The most significant thing is the upgrade in the hardware and capacity of the hardware. In the past we were only able to create quality CG through pre-rendering within the game, but now we



■ "Why didn't Jessie call last night? Dammit! I knew I over-cooked those Brussel sprouts. How will any man marry me if I can't even cook Brussel sprouts" (bursts into tears)



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PLAYSTATION 3

FEATURE

Final Fantasy XIII Interview

can move to high quality CG in real time. We've been able to depict and display large monsters or expansive lands. The hardware has been the key this generation.

OPS: How far into development is the game? How long do you expect the process to take?

Kitase: The project is constantly evolving, so there is no specific time limit, it is still ongoing. The battle system in particular is something that we continuously play with and try and improve – it's not fixed yet. The scenario is pretty much complete and the artistic side of the game is about 80% complete.

OPS: MGS4 released everywhere at once, will you try to mirror that?

Kitase: We're definitely trying to decrease the time gap between the Japanese version and the European version. We want a global audience to be able to get their hands on it. So we are going to start localisation earlier and cut back that time as much as possible, but as you know, RPGs are very text-heavy. There are a lot of lines and menu text as well but we are trying to do it as quickly as possible.

OPS: We've been watching the same clip for two years now, any chance of getting an update?

Hashimoto: [laughing] We can't exactly disclose when you'll be able to see something, but right now the main priority is to complete the game

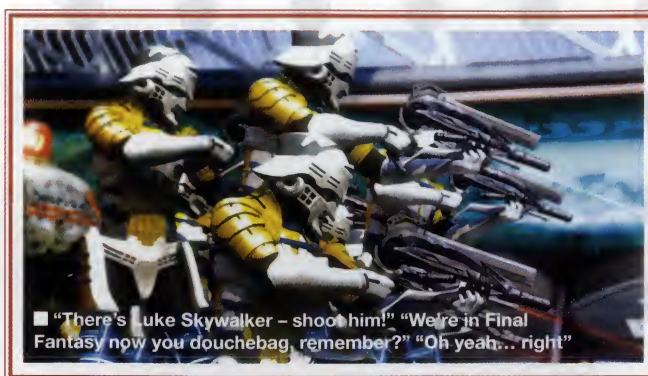
itself, and that is what we are focused on. You'll have to look forward to the next big announcement.

OPS: With the overseas success of the series, do you take the Western audience into consideration more?

Hashimoto: After *Final Fantasy VII* a lot of doors opened for the series. When the game first started to be picked up for the overseas markets the creative team also started to become very conscious of trying to eliminate any Japanese customs in the game, but maybe they became too conscious of that. For *XIII* they are trying to just be very natural about it. The developers are born and raised in Japan, so the culture follows naturally from their actions and ideas. So they don't need to be conscious of bringing Japanese culture or European or North American culture into the game. For *XIII* we're trying not to focus on culture.

OPS: Is there pressure from fans to outdo the trailers and images you release before the game hits the shelves worldwide?

Kitase: Not so much pressure, but with the Internet these days we get feedback from fans right away when we release a new trailer, and people have opinions about it. So the team is able to get that feedback directly from fans, and if there is something good the team will take that into consideration and incorporate it into the game. So in that sense the reaction is very important.



■ "There's Luke Skywalker – shoot him!" "We're in Final Fantasy now you douchebag, remember?" "Oh yeah... right"

OPS: What do you think the core values of the *Final Fantasy* series are?

Hashimoto: Of course different games aim to have different elements to differentiate them from other games in the market. With *Final Fantasy* we believe the key element for this series is that we constantly try to reach the highest potential that is available in that generation of console. Constantly trying to raise the bar and outdo ourselves with quality.

Kitase: Sakaguchi was in charge of the *Final Fantasy* series previously, and I had a discussion where I jokingly asked him what should remain in the game – what makes *Final Fantasy*, *Final Fantasy*? Sakaguchi said "as long as we have those message boxes in blue down the bottom of the screen we'll be fine". [laughs]

OPS: Will *Final Fantasy* ever be final

or will the series be around for the next 40 years?

Hashimoto: [laughing] I'll be 80 by then, so I probably won't be working on *Final Fantasy*. The *Final Fantasy* series doesn't follow a linear order or timeline from one through to *XIII*, but essentially *FF* is about having a team wanting to create the greatest game for each generation of console. As long as there are teams that want to create the best games, then *FF* will live on for sure.

Kitase: I was just a fan when the first four games in the series were released, but became involved with *FFVII*. A lot of the staff working on *Final Fantasy XIII* right now were just fans when *Final Fantasy VII* came out, so perhaps with *FFXIII* there will be a new generation who are inspired and they will continue creating *Final Fantasy* games in the future. 📌



■ "I love you even though you just killed meeeeeeee..."



■ "GET OUT OF THE WAY! NEIGHBOURS STARTS IN T-MINUS TEN MINUTES!"

XIII, Versus, Agito?

Information about the three games has been slow to leak out, but each will be very different games. With a 90 minute demo for *FFXIII* in the works, the story will have 'Lightning' in the lead with the other main characters acting as protagonists instead of just 'support' characters.

Versus will see a world that worships Shinigami, the death god. Images so far show the Prince and Skirt girl but we've been advised that much of that look will change.

Agito will be a PSP game with turn-based combat using the *Crisis Core* ATB system. The plan is to have multiple party members in the game with multiplayer.

PSP

PlayStation Portable

PlayStation 2



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ONLINE

The latest PSN news, online reviews, reader online sections and more!

CHECK OUT...

...all this juicy online goodness



Secret Agent Clank

Players can check out the latest entry into the *Ratchet & Clank* franchise by downloading this bad boy quick smart. Could a move towards downloadable PSP games be inevitable?



Dead Space

Dead Space continues to impress fans of the survival horror genre, and make converts of those who just love games in general. Combines the oppressive dread of *Event Horizon* with the tension of *Alien*.



The Last Guy

Using Google Earth's satellite imagery as a launching pad, *The Last Guy* is an intriguing prospect that continues the tradition of PSN originality. Zombie smashing? Count us in!



Prince of Persia

One of our favourite trailers from E3 was this, a slow paced effort featuring music from *Sigur Ros*, showcasing the incredible art style and animation of one of Ubisoft's most promising titles.



Resistance 2

This one cannot be missed. Download said trailer to get a real taster for the sense of scale and wonder this game is sure to elicit. The big marauding beast at the beginning? Incredible!



God of War III

If you haven't seen this then shame on you, idiots. This short CG effort elicited both excitement and disappointment from us at OPS towers. Simply put, we want more, much more. Sadly, this will have to do for now.



RATCHET & CLANK FUTURE: QUEST FOR BOOTY

Bootylicious

We love booty, absolutely adore it – both the piratey kind and the Beyonce kind, so when we were asked if we wanted to get some hands-on time with booty of the *Ratchet & Clank* variety, how could we refuse? We couldn't, obviously, hence the preview...

First, the story – a tale as old as videogaming time – Clank has been kidnapped and it's your duty to rescue him, duking it out with pirates, island monsters and a variety of others in your quest to liberate your robotic chum.

The gameplay itself is not quite what you might expect. The 'shooty', 'jumpy', 'platformy' aspects remain, of course, but aiding and abetting this solid game design is a well measured 'adventure' aspect that recalls the old school point and click

adventures of videogames past.

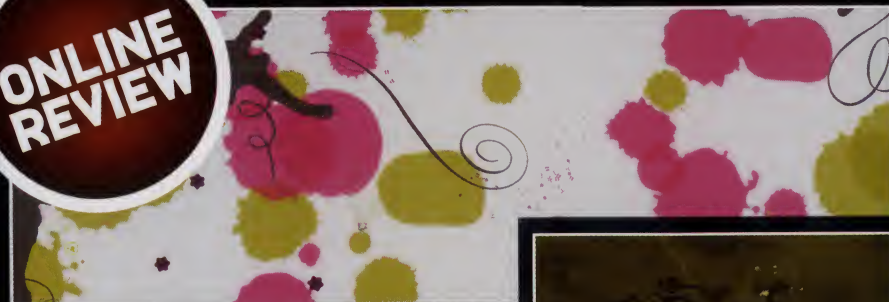
It's a genre of gaming we mourn daily, so we found this aspect of *Ratchet* profoundly refreshing.

Quest for Booty also partakes in some well refined, perspective shifting gameplay. Those who played *Mario Galaxy* on the Wii will have a rough idea of what we're talking about. Armed with a perfectly honed camera, *R&C* proceeds to mess around with your concept of gravity on more than one occasion, with some warped platforming sections we found particularly enjoyable.

Question marks abound with regards to its value (it's only 3 hours long), but it's refreshing to see more high budget titles being released on the PSN. Long may it continue – this will be well worth a swatch when it's released before Chrimbo.



ONLINE
REVIEW



PIXEL JUNK EDEN

Heavenly...

Q Games is fast becoming one of our favourite developers, on the PSN or otherwise. After being intrigued by the peculiar, yet compelling, game rules of *Pixel Junk Racers*, then simply blown away by the perfectly balanced *Pixel Junk Monsters*, we watched intently for the next in the series with bated breath.

Of course, as expected, Q Games have dropped another piece of magic on the PSN doorstep.

Q Games have become masters at taking old game design and throwing a fresh twist on it. *PJE* is as simple as they come, yet almost impossible to describe. Jumping through an evolving psychedelic garden paradise, you must manoeuvre your way through, collecting Spectra.

The controls are sublime, if a little inaccessible to begin with. Pressing a face button causes you to leap into the air, with a trail of silk in your wake. With this silk you can easily swing in a complete 360° to collect the items essential to progress. Sounds basic, but once you get into the intricacies of timing you can leap through the environment like poetry in motion. Slick, smooth and without flaw – just like the game design itself.

Once again, we absolutely love it. Q Games continue to go from strength to strength, without a single misstep along the way. We can't wait to see what they come up with next.

★★★★★

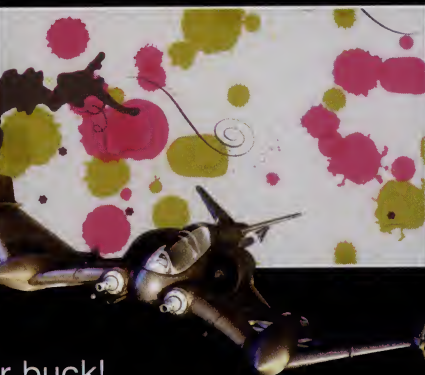


WARHAWK V1.4

Delivering more bang for your buck!

While other expansions require you to cough up your hard earned cashola, *Warhawk* gives you a little something for nothing. This latest free add-on includes two full new game modes, 'Hero' and 'Collection', and a ribbon that should significantly bolster the continuing lack of teamwork.

Collection is like Capture the Flag times a thousand... err... make that times four. There are four mini nuclear reactors with power cores you can pick up. You can carry up to four, and once collected you return them to home base for points. The cool thing is, you can throw the reactor cores to team-mates if you're about to die. It's like CTF crossed with rugby.



In 'Hero', for thirty seconds one member from each team gets every weapon (significantly more powerful than normal) and 500% health. As the hero you get a point for your team for each kill, two points if you kill the other hero, and if you get axed, the other team gets a point. This mode is painfully addictive, but newbies beware, a lot of elite players wreck shop in Hero, so be careful.

Last is the 'Winning Team' ribbon, which gives a whopping 50 points if you play the whole game and win. This promotes teamwork instead of going for individual points glory, and stops shifty players swapping teams at the last second for a win.

★★★★★

LOLGASM



CRAP KRATOS

Nothing makes us chuckle more than a great, cosplaying fatty dressing up as Kratos (check it out online, there's hundreds of those bastards). So imagine our absolute glee when we found a home video online of a chubby dressing up as Kratos and haring it down a long corridor like the fat *Star Wars* kid of old. It's gold Jerry, solid gold...

Watch it at: <http://www.gametrailers.com/player/usermovies/52414.html>

Or Google: God of War Funny



CONSOLE WARS

This is a bit of an oldie, but still worth watching. As reps from the video game heavyweights assemble to duke it out in battle, Sony, Nintendo and Microsoft all deploy the heavies in a bid to win the console wars. Sony brings in Snake and Kratos, while Microsoft bring in ye olde Master Chief in a bid for glory.

Watch it at: <http://www.gametrailers.com/player/usermovies/25050.html>

Or Google: Console Wars Parody



ASSASSIN'S NEEDS

This is a weird one that starts out slow, but gets relatively hilarious towards the end. Obviously as part of some bug, it clearly looks like a guard is humping a table – what makes it all the more compelling are the bizarre sound effects that accompany the 'humpage'.

Watch it at: <http://www.gametrailers.com/player/usermovies/133386.html>

Or Google: Assassin's Creed Kinky Guard

All

PS3

PS2

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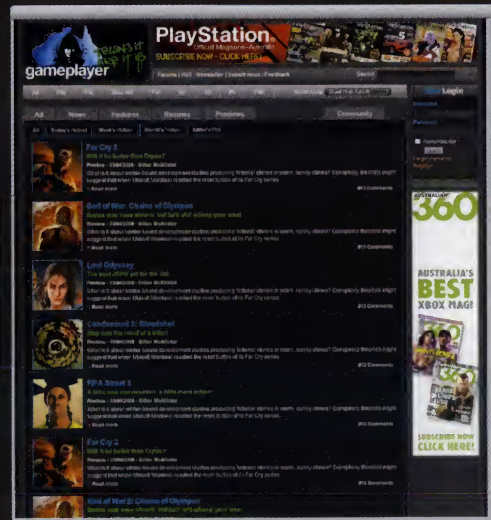
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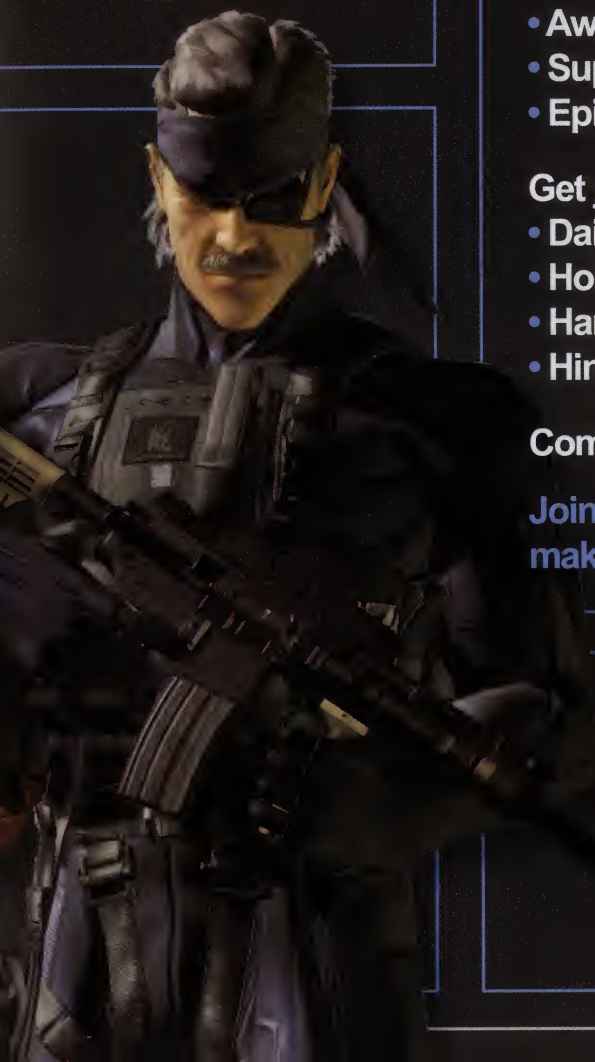
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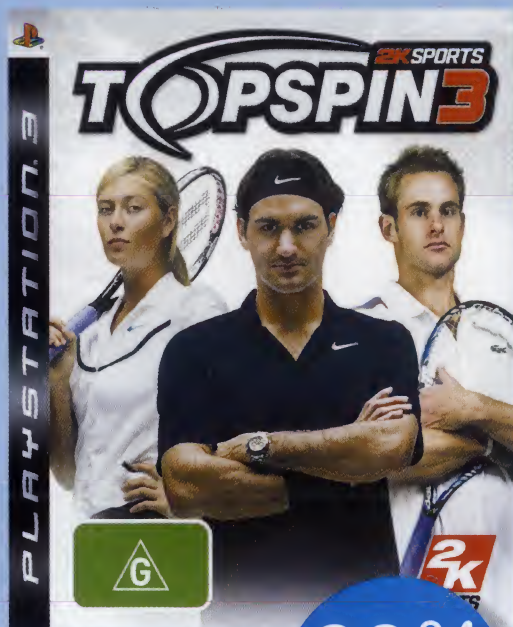
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REVIEWS

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REVIEW RATINGS

01 Reserved for the very worst that developers have to offer. Essentially, anything that receives this score has no redeeming qualities whatsoever. A game receiving this score could not possibly be any worse, unless it was broken from the outset (or gave you cancer, or killed your dog). A game that should never have even survived its first pitch – as bad as it gets.

02 A terrible, terrible game. There may be one or two things about this game that work, or aren't actually broken, but they are so hopelessly outnumbered by the sheer quantity of badness that they basically cease to exist. Maybe it has a clever name, maybe the concept was sound – but virtually every single thing about it is bad beyond belief. Not worth the effort.

03 Very disappointing. A game with this score is fundamentally flawed in a number of extremely vital ways. There may be one or two things that could've been done somewhat worse than they have been, but for most part it's totally uninspired, boring and unappealing in every way. There are games that are worse, but there's not that many.

04 Poor. There may be parts of this game that are vaguely fun, and it may be robust enough in a few departments, but the overall package is lacking any significant reason to stick it out. Games receiving this score may show initial promise, or sound good at first, but will be unrefined, undercooked and let down by shoddy execution and poor attention to detail.

05 Mediocre. In the strictest terms, 50% is a pass – just. Unfortunately, a game receiving this score will have had just as many things go wrong with it as go right, and that really isn't enough to succeed. A game receiving this score will probably be entertaining in parts without excelling anywhere, yet equally sub-par in others without being outright awful.

06 Decent enough, although still lacking a certain something. A game receiving this score will be sound, but will have some fairly glaring faults and your interest will probably wane pretty quickly. It will have a number of limitations that will probably turn off more than a few gamers, but will get just enough right to keep dedicated fans of the genre ploughing through.

07 Good. A robust, fun game that's well worth a look, although will only rarely amaze. A game receiving this score will have more or less accomplished nearly all it set out to do in a decent fashion, but it will have some noticeable problems that prevent it from being as good as it could be. Nevertheless, they generally won't ruin the overall gaming experience.

08 Great. A game receiving this score comes highly recommended. A combination of some odd issues, minor problems or a lack of innovation may hamper it somewhat, but the overall impression it leaves it very positive. Very entertaining, very satisfying and you wouldn't hesitate to recommend it to others. Well ahead of the pack in most departments.

09 Excellent. Outstanding in almost every way. Some negligible blemishes will just keep it from being held aloft as a true masterpiece, but it is very likely the best in its field. Most elements of this game will be truly remarkable and you'll be hard-pressed to find too many other games of greater quality. An astonishing game that leaves all but the very best behind.

10 Incredible. Everything went right during the creation of this game. A game receiving a perfect 10 does not necessarily mean it is perfect, likely just teasingly close, but to reserve 10s for THE perfect game is pointless. Instead, a 10 represents a game of gobsmacking brilliance, a game that stands high above the rest and a game that you cannot afford to ignore. A masterpiece.

THE OPS AWARDS



The Gold Award
is a rare gem and only to be given to games that score that magic 10/10. This score indicates gaming of simply incredible quality!



The Silver Award
is for games that receive 9/10. If you see this, it's a sign of star quality, indicating that you should buy this game now!



The Bronze Award
is for games that score 8/10. These games are highly recommended and are 100% guaranteed to satisfy.

OPS REVIEW SETUP



We choose to review our games on a super-slick Full HD 1080p 40" Bravia X-series for the best picture possible. This sucker melts eyeballs...

INSIDE...



STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED

Do or do not – there is no try – page 90



BAJA: THE EDGE OF CONTROL

The edge of average? – page 96



MERCENARIES 2: WORLD IN FLAMES

Set stuff on fire... a lot of stuff – page 98

■ **GENRE:** ACTION
 ■ **RELEASE:** SEPTEMBER 2008
 ■ **DEVELOPER:** LUCASARTS
 ■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** ACTIVISION

■ **PLAYERS:** 1
 ■ **PRICE:** \$99.95
 ■ **HD:** 720p
 ■ **WEB:** www.theforceunleashed.com

■ **BACK STORY:** This is LucasArts' first next-gen title they've developed in-house and the first time they've worked directly with film SFX heavyweights Industrial Light & Magic. As a result *The Force Unleashed* is loaded with the latest tech.

■ You know when you wake up and there's some drool on the pillow. Yeah, well you ain't got shit on this guy



STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED

Lightsabers, stormtroopers and bolts of lightning out yer pants

We've now finished, smashed, Force pushed, fried and flung *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed*. We've ogled its Star Warsy getaways, stroked its DMM, Havok and Euphoria loins, and copped a gob full of auxiliary *Star Wars* lore. While that's all here and present in LucasArts' latest, that's not what *The Force Unleashed* is really all about. Nope, it's a massive great big *Star Wars* tug-a-thon for those that listed Jedi as their religion on the census.

A LONG TIME AGO, ETC

Ironically enough for anything pertaining to *Star Wars* in the last decade, the story contains a decent whack of drama as it fleshes out the games Sith play in

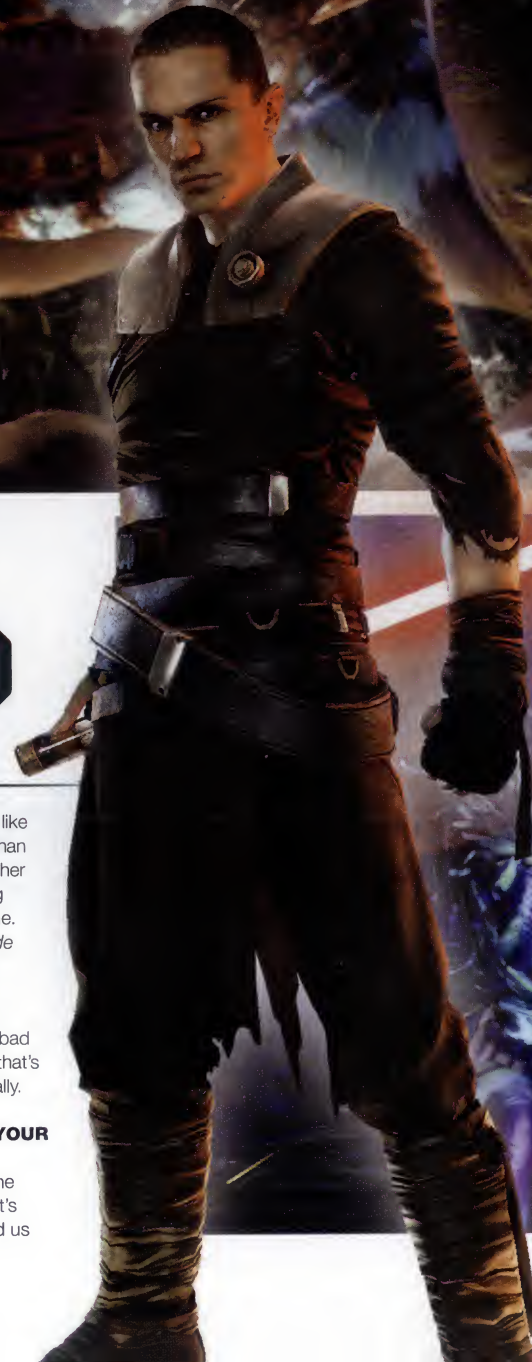
their own backyards. As most of you've probably heard, *The Force Unleashed* sees you take control of Darth Vader's secret apprentice as he sniffs and snuffs out the galaxy's remaining Jedi. As logic would have it, murder lots of noble heroes and you grow more powerful with the Dark Side – precisely what Vader wants before he sets up a usurping tea party with your rotten self and the Emperor. We won't ruin the rest of it for you, but suffice to say there are a few slick surprises along the way as we learn how the Sith roll.

As it stands, control of the galaxy makes for solid grounds to grab a lightsaber and run amok as an all-powerful scumbag. The grand aim of LucasArts is that *TFU* floods your genitals with Dutch

force lightning to make you feel like a Sith bomb – more fearsome than Naomi Campbell in the maw of her monthly cycle, more intimidating than Russell Crowe with a phone. Remember that scene in *Episode I* where Darth Maul's spaceship enters Tatooine and the African drums start to kick up, and you know whoever is in that ship is bad news? *TFU* wants you to think that's you! It succeeds, but only partially.

IS THAT A SCHWARTZ IN YOUR POCKET?

A big part of sucking you into the drama of any game is the way it's presented, and visually *TFU* had us



■ Argh! I've got to stop wearing these rubber soled shoes...



BOSSING ABOUT THE FORCE

The standout moments in *TFU* are the boss battles – no question. You'll take on a range of Jedi and Force mongrels throughout your game, and while we don't want to spoil the last few, they will definitely bring a smile to the faces of *Star Wars* fans. It turns out the first boss battle you have is one of the best. Jedi General Kota ambushes you high in an observation tower and midway through the fight he rips the tower from its placement and throws it down into the atmosphere of a planet as the duel continues inside!



■ "Just let me chop up this bread for ya..." "Um, I just asked for a sandwich... don't you think the lightsaber is a little excessive?"

wiping away volumes of pip drool not seen since we first saw that metal bikini hanging coldly over what must have been the hardest nipples in a galaxy far, far away. In particular, the character models pull off a solid range of emotional gymnastics during cutscenes (which cuts back the need for tacky redundant dialogue) and look sharp and spiffy when they're engaged in standard battle theatrics, jumping, shooting and leaping about the place. A big tick there.

The other big, big plus is the art design, or overall look of the game, that has completely nailed the epic uncanniness of the *Star Wars* universe where size matters. The planet Felucia, for instance, is home to a massive Sarlac monster about five times the size of the one in *Return of the Jedi*. At one point you're engaged in a huge melee while the tentacles thump the ground around – or on top of – you. Then there's the sprawling junk world of Raxus Prime that's lined with huge caverns and the

offcuts of hundreds of broken Star Destroyers. Coupled with neurotically detailed background animations that see spaceships zooming about and junk freely flowing through gravitational rings, *TFU* is a stunning full-frontal perv.

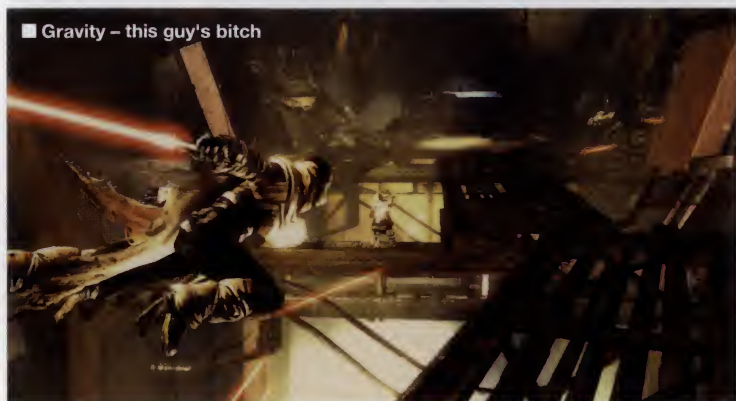
THE PLANET THAT FORCE BUILT

But great art direction and visual panache are not to be confused with great level design. *TFU* strives to reach the holy pinnacles of, say, *God of War II*'s character-laden levels, but fails as often as it succeeds. The first couple of levels are a case in point – creatively flat, and hardly indicative of the spurts of quality seen later on. The opening mission sees you control the lumbering but force-pimped Darth Vader as he stomps through Kashyyyk turning wookies into fur coats. But it's a long strip of land with a few doors, a few timber footbridges, and not much else. This is Peasantry Game Design 101. Compare that with the blistering scale and intensity of the final

■ "Do or try not. No wait... that's not right. Try or do not? Man, I'm the worst Jedi ever..."



■ Gravity – this guy's bitch



■ "Dance for me." "This is weird..." "Just shut up and DANCE!"

mission which is set in a familiar location not to be spoiled, and it's anyone's guess why such quality wasn't expressed throughout the game.

One thing the levels do consistently manage to prove is that you're playing a down-the-line action game. There are no puzzles in *TFU*, no options for approaching combat or situations in any other ways besides head-on, and few provisions for exploration beyond collecting a few of the game's holocrons. It's a point-to-point linear affair that follows the well-travelled formula of 'enter area, kill bad/good guys. Rinse and repeat'.

To be honest we were hoping for a little more than that. It's okay to have your prime focus being on the combat, but when you're running on twitch fibres rather than grey matter the fantasy of feeling like a genuine Sith villain tends to

"...*TFU* had us wiping away volumes of pip drool not seen since we first saw that metal bikini..."

go out the window – replaced with tap, tap, tap smash.

FEEL THE PAIN, FOOL

Which brings us to the game's combat. Again, half of the cogs in the kick arse machine are sharp, while the others seem a touch unpolished.

The positive bits come courtesy of the massive range of fantasy moves, acrobatics, combos and powers you deal in. Your lightsaber is a hotted up stick o' pain (we sooo wish we could get Mr. T to say that) capable of slashing John Doe Stormtrooper to oblivion in a heartbeat.

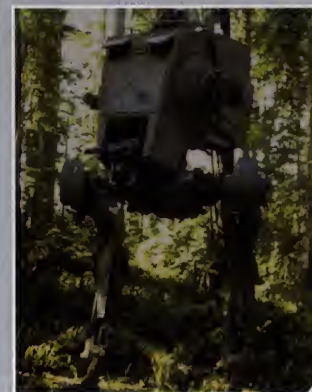
It's common to do the Mace Windu jiggle, in fact, as you speed up to Stormtroopers, reflecting their blasts with your lightsaber right before you hand them a receipt for buying the farm. Later on you can also racquet enemies into the air for follow-up air combos.

Cooler still is the Force Lightning you can "unleash" mid-air on a group of foes that makes you feel like a sky deity. It's even possible to grip an opponent in the air, infuse them with lightning and turn them into an explosive lightning grenade. We like. We like a lot.

Yet the flat tripe in the mix manages

SIZE MATTERS

The best enemies in *TFU* are the biggest. From chicken-legged AT-STs to huge Rancors and massive Junk Bots, they make for some crazy encounters as you get in close to deliver some hot saber lovin'. Smack them about a bit with your Force powers and you'll eventually trigger a *God of War* styled mini-game that, if completed successfully, will see you lay out each of these juggernauts in style. Our favourite had to be the way the secret apprentice finishes off the AT-STs. Ripped straight from inspiring graphical art, the apprentice runs beneath the walker and slashes upwards with his saber, slicing the vehicle completely in two.





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FIRE AT WILL STEALTH KILL
FIELD OF FIRE

BREACH STEALTH
ALPHA TEAM MOBILE

HOLD FIRE BRAVO TEAM GET MOVING

MOVE OUT
SUPPRESSING FIRE

EVALUATE. PLAN. EXECUTE.

THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK. YOUR BRAIN IS THE DEADLIEST WEAPON YOU HAVE. FOUR SOLDIERS LIVES ARE IN YOUR HANDS. THEY WILL FOLLOW YOUR COMMANDS ONLY. SO MAKE NO MISTAKES. TAKE CONTROL ONE OF NINE SPECIAL FORCES TEAMS FROM ACROSS THE GLOBE AND TEST YOURSELF AGAINST THE BEST IN THE WORLD WITH ONLINE PLAY. OR PIT YOUR WITS AGAINST 3 FRIENDS, CLOSE UP AND PERSONAL, WITH AD-HOC MODE. HOWEVER YOU PLAY YOU MUST ALWAYS EVALUATE THE ENEMY, PLAN YOUR ATTACK, THEN EXECUTE WITH PINPOINT ACCURACY. REMEMBER, THE BEST OF THE BEST ARE IN YOUR HANDS.

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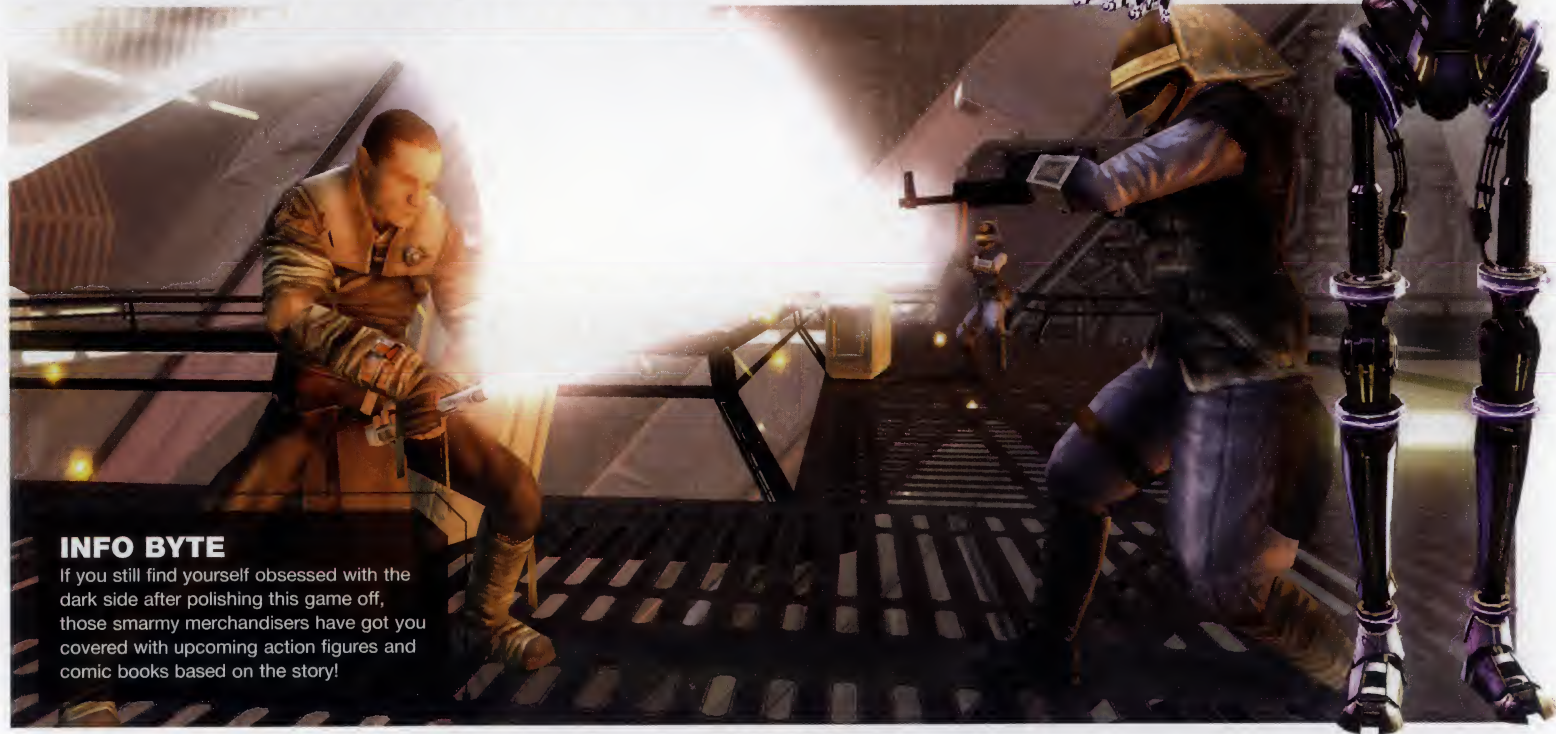
■ Yeah, I hold my lightsaber weird – but it looks cool, right?



■ "I got skills..."



■ ... lightsaber skills."



INFO BYTE

If you still find yourself obsessed with the dark side after polishing this game off, those smarmy merchandisers have got you covered with upcoming action figures and comic books based on the story!

to bring the whole fiasco down a notch. Notably, the Force Grip power that sees you pick up enemies and objects feels ham fisted.

Unlike the levitation in *Destroy All Humans!* that allowed you to move about at the same time, in *TFU* you're left glued to the spot. Not a problem when taking on a handful of pansy Stormtroopers, but when you're trying to quickly fling heavy objects at a couple of angry AT-STs looking to turn you into galactic goop, it feels about as reliable as a Taiwanese car.

IN THE OTHER CORNER

The other major weak point brought into focus during combat is with regards to the enemies. Despite being infused with Euphoria AI – seemingly hyped up as

though it could beat a Grand Master at chess or Gordon Ramsay at cooking a dessert – they seem to be less Temuera Morrison and more brainless lemming.

Despite supposedly being formidable soldiers, the Stormtroopers never seek cover, preferring instead to fire at you as their blasts are repelled and their comrades diced. It becomes readily apparent that their main purpose for being in the game is to help you top your health up as you take on larger enemies (you regenerate some health after a kill).

Fortunately these other enemies include hulking robotic Surge Troopers, saber-wielding Imperial Guards, mystic shamans, and other tough cookies (see **SIZE MATTERS**). While more interesting to fight, they too aren't smartened up by

the presence of Euphoria and the result are melees that can feel like random hack duty at times.

It's not just Euphoria that disappoints. DMM, the molecular matter sim, and Havok, the physics engine, don't really do all that much to distinguish the game. If anything, DMM can be appreciated when using the Force to pull open steel doors and gateways, but not enough of the world is imbued with these properties to really provide any sort of brave new

experience in the game itself.

MAY THE FORCE BE WITH YOU

Flaws aside, *TFU* is without doubt a slick and easily digestible romp through the galaxy. *Star Wars* fans will be obsessed – action fans will find it worth their time. It looks stunning, packs a smart story, and allows fans to live out their Force-powered wet dreams. The Force is definitely with this one, though it's not quite a Jedi yet.

✎ James Ellis

PROS:

- Go postal with the Force
- Some memorable bosses

CONS:

- Not as innovative as hoped
- A little short

VERDICT: A Force bonanza that plays a good game of Sith but fails to use its idea to max effect.

OFFICIAL
SCORE:

07

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■ **GENRE:** RACING
■ **RELEASE:** SEPTEMBER 2008
■ **DEVELOPER:** 2XL GAMES
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** THQ

■ **PLAYERS:** 1-4 (1-8 ONLINE)
■ **PRICE:** \$89.95
■ **HD:** 720p
■ **WEB:** www.2xlgames.com

■ **BACK STORY:** This is the first game for 2XL Games, a developer founded in 2005 and now nestled in Arizona in the US of A. It was founded by blokes from Rainbow Studios, the crew responsible for *Motocross Madness* and *ATV Offroad Fury*.

■ "Don't drive so, don't drive so, don't drive so close to me!" For his first attempt, Sting was doing pretty well in the Baja 500...



■ Schwarzenegger played it smart – he "got to the chopper"



BAJA: EDGE OF CONTROL

A sleep-behind-the-wheel simulator

Recent scholarly maestros have made claim that the sheer amount of info we suck in these days has forced us to make judgements about things by first glance. First impressions aren't merely important, they're now Rick "bitchin" James important. That doesn't hold well for *BAJA: Edge of Control*, which looks as bland as day-old fast food. Fortunately the abominable coat of paint set to turn rafts of gamers away faster than a flashing geezer isn't deterring folk from a would-be masterpiece in game design. It's dull to play, too.

That's not to say that *BAJA* strikes us as a game thrown together without thought or heart-shaped chocolatey love. There are a lot of good intentions

smattered about here and we're sure that at least a couple of hapless consumers will play it for a couple of days before returning it.

An off-road mud blender that features several different vehicle classes, including diesel-guzzling 4x4s, Super Trucks, and Herbie-esque Baja bugs, it's *MotorStorm* without the spicy minerals. There's no zany boost ability, no DOA jumps, no coin-operated power slides. Instead *BAJA* offers lots of bulky vehicles taking real-time damage, being repaired in pit lanes or by choppers, and treacherous difficulty against Germanic AI. Rather than rely on split-second twitch skills to nudge into the lead, *BAJA*'s challenge is in controlling the garbled track like a bucking bronco

as you masterfully use both clutch and handbrake to achieve gold and cop a feel from the podium girls. There's nothing wrong with that per se.

Notably the clutch-handbrake racing duo could've been the most addictive racing mechanic we've seen in the better part of a decade. It asks that you pull the handbrake as you enter a hairpin, stomp down on the clutch to make the engine scream, and then release it as the clutch pads engage to pop you down the next straight. Fun with corners – isn't that what it's all about?

So what made it all go south? If you had to list the top four things a game like this must have then you'd be bound to include fundamentals like feel, visuals,

excitement and track design. That's a nominal list, sure, but on some level they're mandatory. Agreed? Right. *BAJA: Edge of Control* makes a right cock up of all of them.

The biggest offender – by far – is the feel of the whole thing. For one, the tiny Baja Buggies, which you're lumbered with at the start of your career, feel like they're constantly towing a dead whale – particularly during pressing events like the Hill Climb. They're also so weak that any sort of jolt will quickly annihilate their shocks and turn them into possessed shopping trolleys. It's such a dog's breakfast you'll be pressed to continue with the entire career. The bigger trucks have more hair on their chests, but they

■ "Hey man, where's your number?" "You need a number?"
"Well, not really, but you should get one – it looks cool"

INFO BYTE

Not only does *BAJA* support Panorama mode, but it also supports a host of steering wheels. Combine them for the "ultimate racing experience". Uh, not quite.

■ Eat my dust! I mean, sand... um, what surface are we driving on again?



■ A big, slow motion, vertical leap – the driver *must* be Burt Reynolds. That's the only explanation that makes any sense...



"...it's *MotorStorm* without the spicy minerals."

feel like boulders when struggling along paths and rolling down inclines. It doesn't seem like you have all that much control over what's going on, and fails to satisfy.

Next: what it looks like. To be fair, *BAJA* is out to do something quite different to *MotorStorm*. Rather than construct a list of open and shut tracks, the team created 1,000 square miles of racing environment first, then mapped tracks out over the top. This means

that you'll often be zooming about while huge vistas in the background await you in the next Hill Climb. It gets points for that. What it doesn't get points for are the game's bland colours, average car models, and paltry texture work. We realise some concessions may have been made to fit in the 1000 square miles, but it wasn't worth the game looking like your naked grandpa.

What mutes the excitement even

more is the aforementioned AI that rarely has any problem skittling its way past you at any moment. Often you'll swear you've done nothing all that wrong on your run, only to see a legion of opponents speed past you down a straight. We can't get behind that.

What makes it all the more painful is that these major issues could've been sanded over with a bit more time. While *BAJA* was never going to have game stores whoring their work experience kids out for another box of product, it might have found some sort of niche. Aside from four-player split-screen support and eight-player online, there's a fun pre-loading system here for jumps, real-time

damage and wear on brakes, tyres, oil and water, and customisable engines – great for the rev heads. The Baja 1000 race mode also would've found fans. Basically it's an endurance race that literally lasts for hours and allows players to let the AI take over while they pop off the controls to take care of real-world business, such as draining the weasel.

So why wasn't it held back for a few more months of polishing and exorcism? We're only speculating, but perhaps it was a case of getting this out before *MotorStorm: Pacific Rift* touched down and dominated life as we know it? Perhaps *BAJA* is just another casualty of business? Them's the breaks. **James Ellis**

3-SCREEN PLAY

If you've got the sort of cash that sees you hit the polo field with Richard Branson, then you might want to pick up three copies of *BAJA* in addition to two more PlayStation 3's and two more large television screens identical to the one you already own. You've now got the kit to play *BAJA* in Panorama mode. This allows you to catch some serious TV rays and the associated diseases as you can surround yourself with three sets – one at the front and two on either side of you – and hooch through the game with a massive viewing area covering all three screens.



PROS:

- Expansive environments
- Great collection of modes

CONS:

- Controls like a weak bladder
- Fell out of the ugly tree

VERDICT: A brave competitor to Sony's mud king, but it's all a bit too bland to get revved up over.

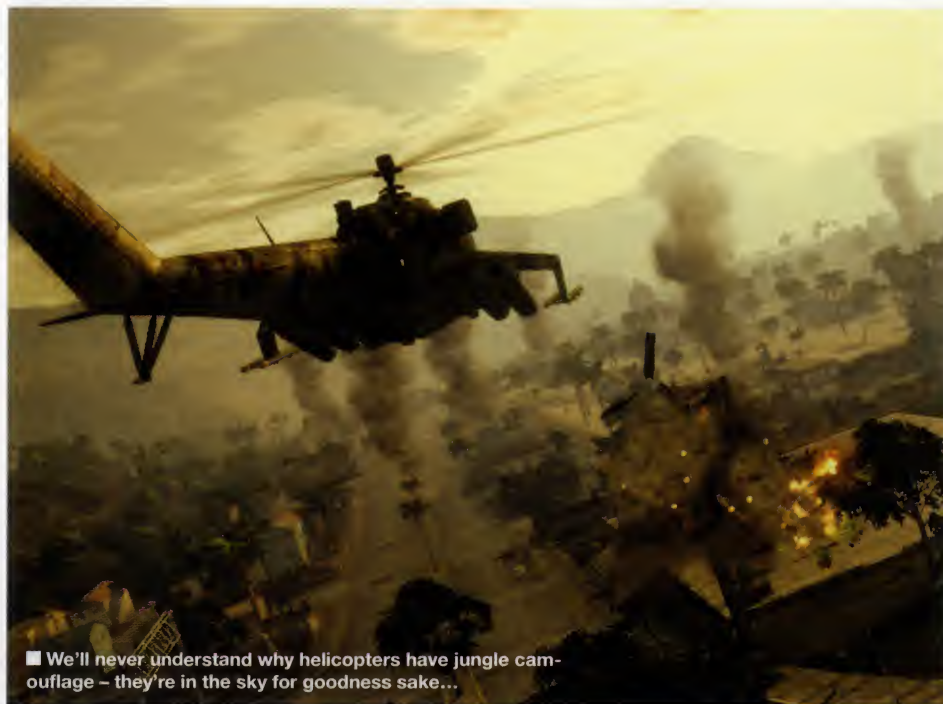
OFFICIAL
SCORE:

06

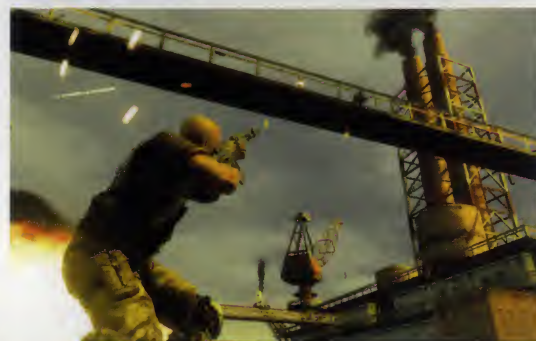
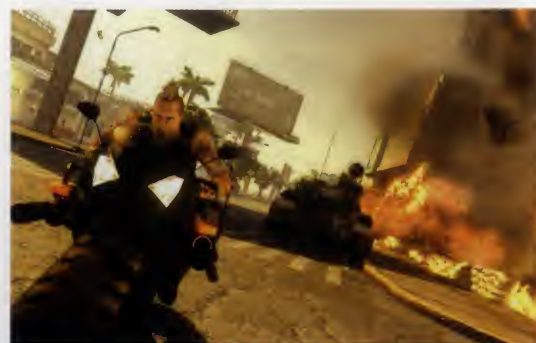
■ **GENRE:** ACTION
■ **RELEASE:** NOW
■ **DEVELOPER:** PANDEMIC STUDIOS
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** EA

■ **PLAYERS:** 1-2
■ **PRICE:** \$99.95
■ **HD:** 720p
■ **WEB:** www.ea.com

■ **BACK STORY:** Pandemic certainly know their way around war. After cutting their teeth on a double dose of *Full Spectrum Warrior*, they went from sim to Jedi with *Star Wars Battlefront II* and now they hit over the top action with *Mercs 2*.



■ We'll never understand why helicopters have jungle camouflage – they're in the sky for goodness sake...



■ Dammit, why didn't you shave your head like me! Aerodynamics are important!

MERCENARIES 2: WORLD IN FLAMES

Flame on!

When trying to work out how to kick off *Mercenaries 2*, we were at a bit of a loss. There really isn't much out there like it. Yeah, *Just Cause* had a similar 'south of the border' flavour, and we're sure it'll draw comparisons to *GTA IV* and *Saints Row 2* due to the sandbox world – but then it came to us like a bolt of lightning. If *GTA IV* is the equivalent to Michael Mann's *Heat* with tense missions and a leaning towards realism, then *Mercs 2* is Michael Bay all the way, and that ain't necessarily a bad thing either. It's ridiculous, ludicrous, outrageous and a whole mess of good old fashioned fun, but more importantly, it doesn't take itself too seriously. If you've ever wanted to

be part of an explosive extravaganza and unleash your 80s action hero, then this is the one for you.

IT'S FUN TO BLOW SHIT UP

Venezuela is your war torn little stomping ground. There are some serious shenanigans going on, and it's all over oil (sound familiar). A ruthless dictator, Solano, has emerged and staged a coup. Where do you come in? After some David Blaine chicanery you realise that the target you were hired to eliminate by said dictator is actually yourself. D'oh!

Worse yet, you delivered said package to him with a neat little bow wrapped around it. After a brief struggle you manage

to escape, *almost* intact. That little rat bastard... he shot you in the ass! Nobody does that. It's time for a little payback with some serious compound interest, and this time it's personal.

The plan is to play factions off against each other, infiltrate enemy encampments, capture intelligence operatives, destroy buildings, rescue hostages and blow the living snot out of any and everything. If you see it, you can blow it up, level it and bring it down to its knees (giggled), all with the bonus of a little green in your back pocket. Think of it as your own personal demolitions project. Pandemic supply the ammo and venue, and you take care of the rest... goddammit, it's a hell of a lotta fun!

BOOM, SHAKE, SHAKE, SHAKE THA ROOM...

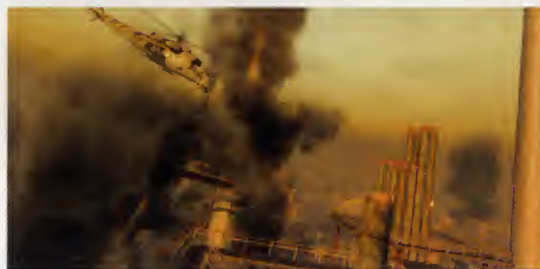
You choose between one of three mercenaries, the faux-hawk sporting Mattias Nilsson, Chris Jacobs, the African American bald bad-ass, or the naughty Eurasian bit of English crumpet, Jennifer Mui. We're partial to Jen. Now before you call us queer, here are two selling points. One, she sounds like Lara Croft, and two, would you rather stare at a chick's arse for 20-30 hours of gameplay or a dude's? Advantage OPS. Moving on... regardless of who you pick, the opening premise remains the same. Within moments we'd had a little *Miami Vice* speedboat moment, wasted a dozen guards, commandeered



INFO BYTE

Any missions you do towards taking down Solano reap no monetary rewards. We dig that, revenge is its own reward.

"Guys, guys, guys. Let's stop the arguing and talk about more important things, like my stylin' new mohawk"



THIS IS RUSSIAN SPACESTATION

You may recognise the husky tones of Mattias Nilsson, he's voiced by actor extraordinaire Peter Stormare, just as in the original. The classically trained Swede is often cast as a Russian mob boss/drug dealer/Cosmonaut/seedy doctor in several big budget actioners. Most characters he plays are on the sleazy side (he rocked in *Bad Boys II*) and have a particular quirk to them. His seriously kick ass set of vocal chords bring each of his parts to life, with a unique accent and flavour all his own.



a tank (more on that later) and made a massive stone gate and the mansion behind it go bye-bye with a precision air strike. We cleared out all remaining hostiles, claimed the half-levelled building as our new base of operations and started recruiting various nefarious individuals to help us blow even *more* shit up. And that's what *Mercs 2* is all about.

It's not less is more, but more is more! You know how most shooters have a few yellow or red barrels strategically placed to go boom? Well *Mercs 2* has dozens. They're everywhere! There are massive fuel dumps in friendly and enemy compounds – you can either siphon it to add to your reserves, whack some C4 on it and use it as a distraction, or use it to take out the enemy in spectacular fashion.

TICK, TICK, TICK, TICK... BOOOOM!!

Many features return from the original, like the side capture missions for intelligence operatives – you can collect bounty on

them dead or alive, and you can also weaken enemy strongholds by taking out hostile buildings in each section of the map.

The infiltration factor is back when you commandeer enemy vehicles, but the most fun is when you utilise aircraft and start jacking larger vehicles like tanks. 'Acquiring' a tank involves perforating the gunner and, after shimmying along the barrel, performing a simple mini-game. You wrestle a grenade from the driver, pop it down the hatch, watch it go BOOM and continue on your way.

Planes and choppers can be used to extradite captured operatives, for transit, to claim fuel, cash and ammo dumps, deliver vehicles or to drop a whole mess of bombs for some jungle landscaping. It's all reminiscent of classic Arnie greats like *Predator* or *Commando*, where one grenade takes out half a compound. Screw realism, this is where it's at.

Now we know we're singing it's

praises, but this is by no means a perfect game. The graphics could have been a little sharper. We were confounded by the 'press **A** to pick-up ammo' mechanic when health and other pick-ups were automatic, and we're not convinced by the fact that, if you die mid-mission with three out of four objectives complete, you can just waltz in and knock off the last one rather than restart. However, it was so much gosh darned fun that we really couldn't give a crap, and you won't either. Cue up your weapons montage, get your camo face paint on and practice your one liners, this is one great way to... "let off some steam!" **— Dave Kozicki**

PROS:

- Blowing stuff up!
- Blowing *more* stuff up!

CONS:

- Redoing whole missions
- Triangle to pick up ammo?

VERDICT: Fun. It's three little letters that seem to have been lost – *Mercs 2* has it in spades!

OFFICIAL
SCORE:
08

■ **GENRE:** PARTY
■ **RELEASE:** LATE 2008
■ **DEVELOPER:** WIDELOAD GAMES
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** THQ

■ **PLAYERS:** 1-4
■ **PRICE:** TBA
■ **HD:** 720p
■ **WEB:** www.hailtothechimp.com

■ **BACK STORY:** We guess that there isn't actually much else out there in the political party game genre, but after experiencing this one we're not sure that we want there to be. What's next – *Hail to the Rudd: Parliament Pants Party?*

INFO BYTE

You can unlock commercials and videos as you play the game, but if you leave the game on the title screen you'll see most of the 'funny' stuff anyway.



HAIL TO THE CHIMP

Nature's clown falls flat...

The science is hazy (and has recently been amended) but apparently humans share about 95% of our genetic material with chimps. This doesn't really explain why we find the little buggers so damn funny. Perhaps it's because that chimp at the zoo looks a bit like your distant cousin, as it sits there naked eating an orange, or something. Whatever the reason, it's an immutable fact that chimps are just funny and we don't know why!

Following this rule, *Hail to the Chimp*, a game about animals standing for election when their *Lion King* goes missing, should be hilarious. After all, it has 'Chimp' in the title. Disappointingly, and despite all its cringeworthy efforts at humour, the game is not funny; it's actually just really, really bad.

The aforementioned animal elections take place during Primaries, metaphorical mini-games that form the entire bulk of both the single player campaign and multiplayer bouts. In these, four players will duke it out in a race to collect the most clams (i.e. votes) within a time limit.

Pretty much every single mini-game involves chasing clams, hitting the snot out of your opponents and then doing something with your clams, be it depositing them, taking them to a 'Fat Cat' for cash or (in an ironic twist) showing your generosity by giving away the most clams to your rivals.

Again, in theory, this 'variety' should make for some enjoyable multiplayer moments, but your desire to have fun is constantly stymied by tiny levels filled to the brim with extremely frustrating instant death situations – such as falling in water, being hit by volcanic rocks, getting caught in a crab cage or burnt by lava. It's like the developers thought it would be awesome to combine their sluggish and unresponsive control scheme with levels that constantly change without warning.

The game's art design, which initially seems cute, cartoony and cheerful, inevitably gets in the way during bouts because there's so much animation on screen that you often lose track of where your character actually is. You'll also often get stuck when trying to squeeze through

a small gap or walking over a bridge due to iffy path-finding.

Hail to the Chimp is unashamed in its American TV station presentation, to the point where the game's woeful humour offers little for an Australian audience. GRR News anchor Woodchuck Chumley (the game's host) will throw to parody ads or utter the odd non sequitur, but it's nothing that hasn't already been done a lot funnier by the likes of *The Simpsons* or *GTA*.

There's simply not enough game here to satisfy even a rabid fan of political satire. The mini-games are boring, pathetic and mind-numbingly repetitive. Go play a board game instead – it won't make you feel like eating your own head.

— Dylan Burns

PROS:

- Nice art design
- It's short

CONS:

- Not funny or enjoyable
- Repetitive

VERDICT: A lame attempt at bringing parody to the world of gaming. Avoid.

TAG TEAM

Teaming up with another player is possible, and you then split your clam winnings down the middle. Unfortunately, when playing alone the CPU players are extremely erratic when it comes to accepting a tag team offer. One minute they're chasing you begging to team up, but then you turn around and they're bashing you for clams. They'll also pretty much ignore your mashing of the team-up button. Bad monkey!



OFFICIAL SCORE:
03



WIN A TRIP TO LOS ANGELES!

It's their city. It's their rules and there will be no prisoners!



When a veteran LAPD cop is implicated in the execution of a fellow officer, he sets out on a quest to find the truth behind the crime and clear his name and at the same time is forced to question the loyalties of everyone around him.

For your chance to win a trip to LA for two people including flights and accommodation, simply rent *Street Kings* from BLOCKBUSTER® during September and then enter online at www.blockbuster.com.au

PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW

■ **GENRE:** ACTION
■ **RELEASE:** NOW
■ **DEVELOPER:** KROME STUDIOS
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** ATARI

■ **PLAYERS:** 1-2
■ **PRICE:** \$99.95
■ **HD:** 720p
■ **WEB:** www.konami.com

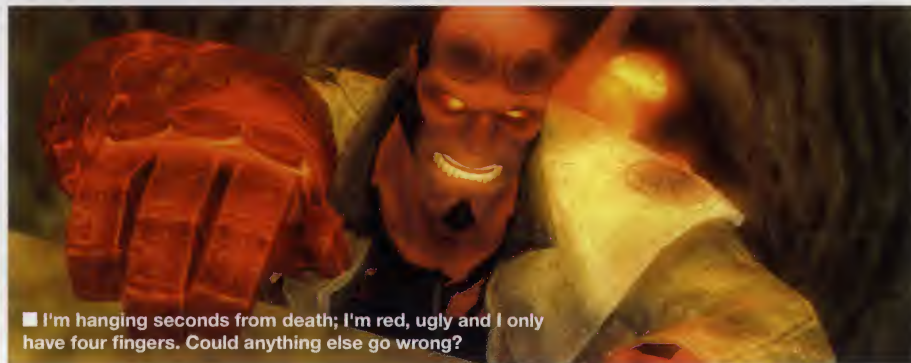
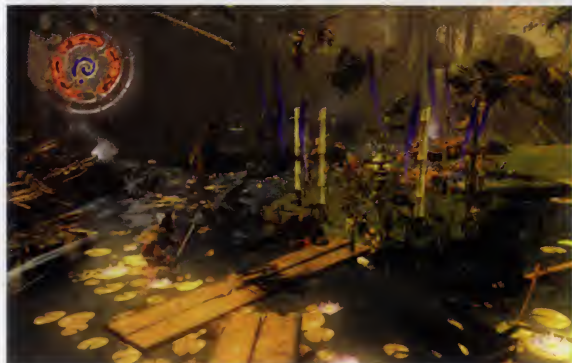
■ **BACK STORY:** *Hellboy* seems to be everywhere. While not based on the comic book the new flick *Hellboy II: The Golden Army* has captured the spirit of the good demon's amusing tall tales. It'd have to be an absolute belter of a game, right? Hmpf.



■ A cyborg gorilla with red eyes. Not exactly what you'd expect to see while traipsing through the jungle...



■ Despite the fact that he has no horns, Hellboy was 'horny'...



■ I'm hanging seconds from death; I'm red, ugly and I only have four fingers. Could anything else go wrong?

HELLBOY: THE SCIENCE OF EVIL

Forces of darkness - prepare for a VIGOROUS FISTING!

Hellboy is many things to many people. For some he's the iconoclastic creation of comic book artiste Mike Mignola. A beautifully realised supernatural/horror action yarn with loads of cool monsters borrowed from varied sources such as H.P. Lovecraft, Eastern European folklore and even fairy tales.

Hellboy is also the basis for two sweet films by crazed genius director Guillermo del Toro.

We mention this to show there is a veritable cornucopia of material to use as basis for a damn fine *Hellboy* game. Sadly this is not that game - this is, well, a bit shit, really...

The whole caper gets off to a dodgy start. You're Hellboy, fanging through a Romanian village, chasing a witch who has the annoying habit of turning into a flock of ravens.

But witchy-poo isn't the problem here. It's the other enemies you face: wee little puppet creatures. They can clamber up your body, employ their own heads as exploding projectiles and swarm over Hellboy.

After bashing your way through dozens of identical looking villages, graveyards and yet more villages - smashing the pint-sized mongrels over and over - the game starts to feel like work. Boring, repetitive, joyless work.

Then they crank out the werewolves which improves things slightly, as you

can perform some grappling moves - including breaking necks, choking them with their own tongues and snapping them in half - plus if you're low on health you can simply chuck a baddie in the air and slam said antagonist.

Next up is a flashback level in Japan, where you'll face off against a deadly mist created by a magic squirrel. This is more like it! But unfortunately this level, like every level, is far too samey. Especially when you return to the present and face yet more bloody puppets!

A nice touch is that the various evil factions are fighting each other at the same time as you're fighting them. There's something very appealing about

watching Nazis blasting mutant frogs who in turn are speared by blood-coloured, spiky plants.

Unfortunately the game is just too shallow and derivative. It feels like the creators just skimmed through a few of the comics, maybe watched the DVD a couple of times and cobbled together this game using the third person action game template.

Hellboy: The Science of Evil is not without its charms, however the long, arduous levels, unsatisfying story and consistent lack of depth all add up to a pretty ordinary experience - and 'ordinary' is something *Hellboy* should never be. **Anthony O'Connor**

BOOM!

Hellboy's gun is a great feature of the comics and, despite a fidgety aiming system, it also rocks here. Varieties of ammo like salt shots - that temporarily freeze your foes, and the self explanatory grenade rounds add a little much-needed flavour to the proceedings. Hellboy? Pah! More like, um Heck Lad. Yeah! Heck Lad...



■ Alright smart guys - who the hell shaved my eyebrows?

PROS:

- Sexy character models
- well-designed monsters

CONS:

- Sluggish gameplay
- Extremely generic

VERDICT: As much as we wanted this to be great it simply isn't. Completely average.

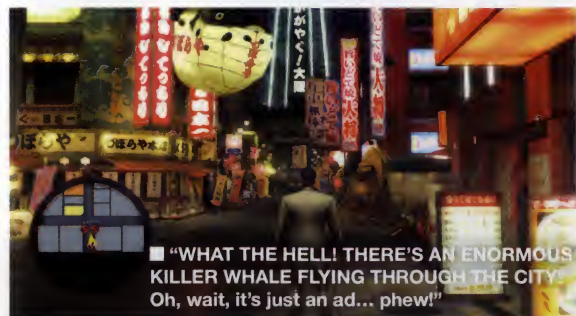
OFFICIAL
SCORE:
06

■ **GENRE:** ACTION
 ■ **RELEASE:** SEPTEMBER 2008
 ■ **DEVELOPER:** SEGA
 ■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** SEGA

■ **PLAYERS:** 1
 ■ **PRICE:** \$49.95
 ■ **HARDWARE:** NO
 ■ **WEB:** ryu-ga-gotoku.com

■ **BACK STORY:** Readers, meet Yakuza 2. A game that was released in Japan in 2006 (!) and is only now making its way to this wide brown land. The first Yakuza was released in 2005 to mostly above-average reviews and the sequel swiftly followed suit.

PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW



■ "WHAT THE HELL! THERE'S AN ENORMOUS KILLER WHALE FLYING THROUGH THE CITY. Oh, wait, it's just an ad... phew!"



■ "Is this a stationary store? I can't tell..."

INFO BYTE

When Yakuza are naughty and make their boss unhappy they have to perform 'Yubitsume' or 'finger shortening'. This is where the offending chap has to chop off the pinkie finger of his right hand. Consequently Yakuza don't chuck many sickies. True story.



■ "Hmm... that restaurant with the enormous crab – do you think, perchance, they might sell crab inside?"



YAKUZA 2

Guaranteed to be 73% more Yakuzary!

We're a bit torn on how to review this game. On the one hand we love the fact that they're still releasing games for the good old PS2, bless them. An epic, two disc game like this sends a strong message: there's still life left in Grandpa PS2.

So what's the problem? *Yakuza 2* is, well, kind of annoying.

Annoying like a howler monkey trying to 'make a baby' in your mouth?

Erm, not quite that bad. *Yakuza 2* is annoying in that it's an open-ended action game that makes you work like a bastard to get to the actual action. A perfect example is the opening: lengthy, often incomprehensibly dense flashbacks to the previous game, and the set-up for this one plays out like bad soap opera.

The thing is, the story isn't even all that deep: Kiryu Kazuma – once a big player in the Yakuza – is picking up the tattered threads of his life after 10 long years in jail. Despite wanting out of the whole seedy criminal underworld, he soon finds himself deeply involved with the obligatory 'mysterious plot' involving Haruka – an enigmatic girl – and a missing \$100 million.

That's it! That's the whole set up. Certainly the plot twists and turns as the game plays out, but essentially that paragraph gets you up to speed on what it's all about.

Instead, we get about 45 minutes worth of unskippable cut scenes,

■ When asked their hobby, 90% of Japanese people will list shopping. (Fake) fact!



remembering this is the PS2 here so it doesn't look terribly good, leading up to a point where you can choose to get yet more exposition or actually, you know, do some gameplay stuff.

We chose to do stuff and finally got in a fight. Hooray, some biff!

The fighting mechanic is good. Using face buttons you can punch, kick, grapple and throw your enemies. Sounds familiar, certainly, but the way it's set up allows you to pummel a foe in front of you and then, quick as a flash, send a roundhouse kick sandwich to the baddie behind you.

Meh. Sounds okay. Got anything excessively violent?

Indeed, there are some satisfyingly brutal environmental moves. After you've worked up a head of steam – or blue flame as is this case here – you can grab one of your foes and, if you're near a snack vending machine, you'll smash your

hapless victim's head through the glass. Near some steps? You'll trip your foe and stamp on their head. Is there a big drop close by? Well send that Yakuza scum screaming off the edge.

But after the fight – more cut scenes! *Yakuza 2* is a deep, long, epic game. If you've only got a PS2 it'll probably prove to be a decent investment. However, PS3 owners aren't going to want to sit through cut scene after cut scene just to get to a bit of tasty action.

We have *Metal Gear Solid 4* for that.

— Anthony O'Connor

TOO MUCH YAKUZA IS NEVER ENOUGH

Those of you who are fans of the Yakuza genre should take heart in the fact there is another Yakuza game coming out for PS3. It's set 400 years before the recent Yakuza titles, so it should probably count as a prequel. For other mediums we heartily recommend the work of mad Japanese director Takashi Miike and *Ich the Killer* in particular.



PROS:

- Fast fighting mechanic
- Open environments

CONS:

- The fights get repetitive
- A lot of cutscenes

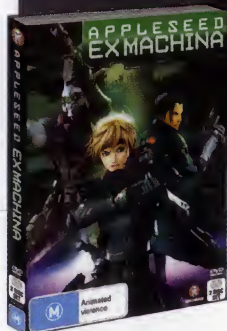
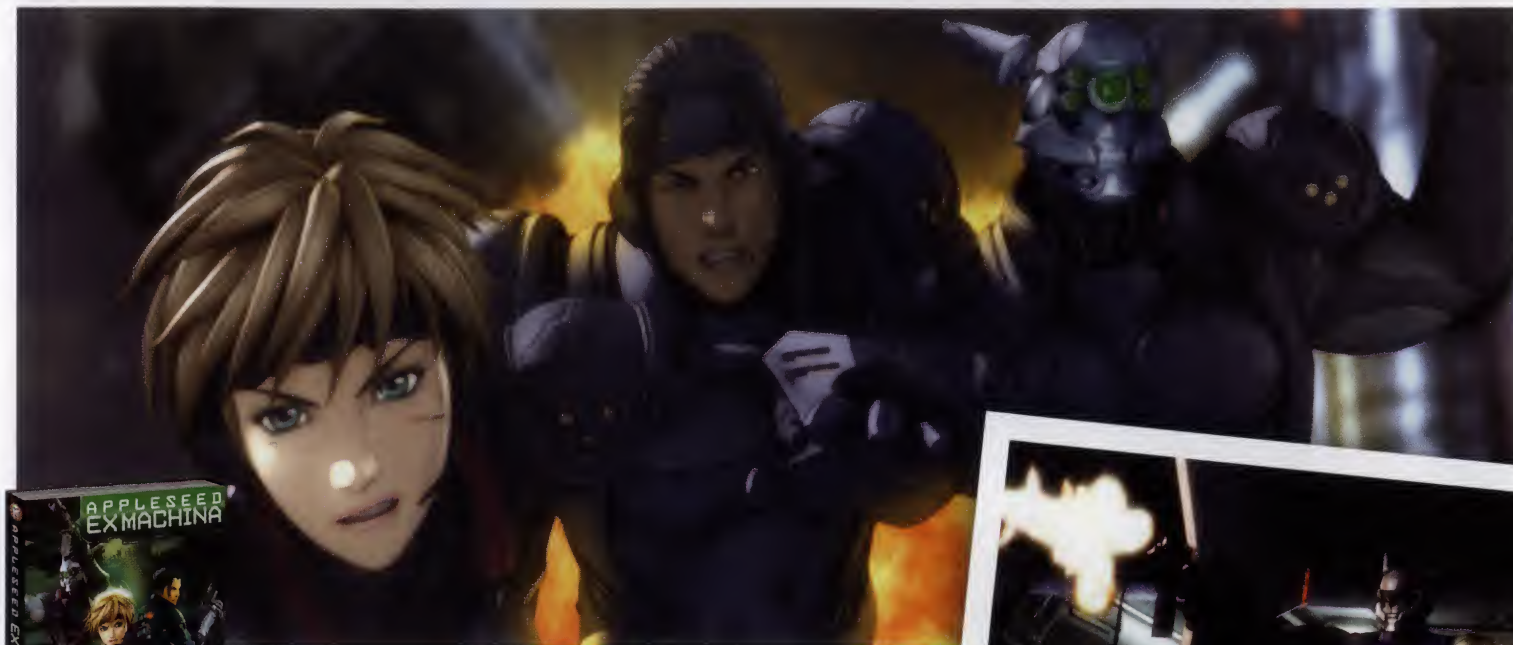
VERDICT: Not bad, but it's something of an acquired taste. Best to try it before you fork out.

OFFICIAL SCORE:

06

FILM

We delve into horror with *One Missed Call*, *Appleseed Ex Machina*, *L: Change the World* gives you your anime fix, and a double dose of Kubrick on Blu-ray.



DVD OF THE MONTH

APPLESEED EX MACHINA (M)

■ **STARRING:** Luci Christian, David Matranga and Illich Guardiola.

■ **DIRECTOR:** Various

Brilliantly picking up where the previous *Appleseed* left off, *Ex Machina* follows the action-packed adventures of ESWAT operatives Deunan Knute and her cyborg partner/lover Briareos. It's produced by John Woo, and that's definitely apparent as you watch the ESWAT boys go to town on cyber terrorists, amidst a sea of flying doves and a hail of empty shell casings.

Post World War III, genetically engineered 'bioroids' – clones with aggressive emotions suppressed – are the future of humanity and take up prominent political positions, yet

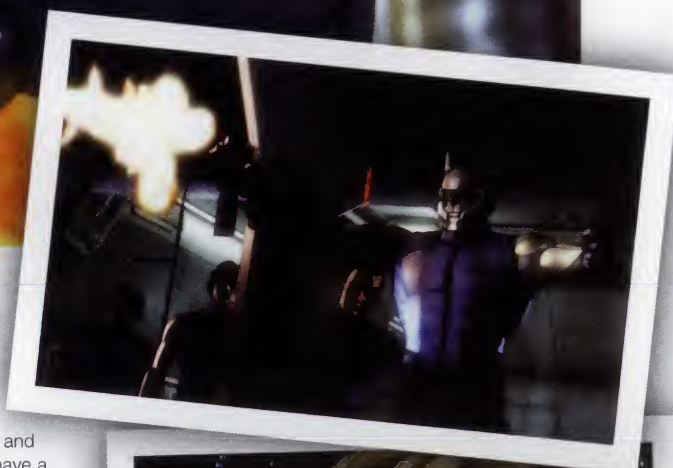
something is amiss. A data stream is influencing all technology and taking over its users, and it is after Briareos. It's a great change of pace to have the plot focus on Briareos as opposed to Deunan. In particular, the confrontation between Briareos and the cloned human version of himself, Terius, highlights the frustration and conflict that resides within him.

The opening scene is amazing, and Deunan makes John Matrix, Riggs, Lara Croft and Rambo look like a bunch of pussies. The back-to-back shootout is everything *Army*

of *Two* wished it could be and the jaw-dropping visuals have a flavour of their own. Add some mad scientists, dodgy corporations, sexy babes, technology gone astray and some of the most outrageous fight sequences we've ever seen – this baby has it all.

VERDICT: Unlike anything we've ever seen. The streamlined story is a welcome change to the usual mind bending anime antics and the action is both original and kick-arse.

★★★★★



ESSENTIAL ANIME-TION

Want to get into anime but don't know where to start? Here's a short list of some of the best out there, all considered essential viewing.



CASTLE OF CAGLIOSTRO

An early Miyazaki flick. It follows the exploits of master thief Lupin III, consummate smart-arse, dashing rogue and ladies man, 100% cut from the James Bond mould. This is one of the greats.



AKIRA

Akira changed the landscape of animation. It depicts a *Blade Runner*-esque, neon-saturated future filled with psychics, revolutionaries and rough and tumble bike gangs. Absolutely insane!



NINJA SCROLL

Set in feudal Japan, it follows the blood-soaked travels of ninja warrior Jubei. This is a very adult offering with rape and seduction scenes and an insane amount of violence.



PRINCESS MONONOKE

Miyazaki part II. It focuses on the conflict between supernatural guardians of the forest, aided by Mononoke, and the humans who are consuming it. A great tale of nature versus technology.



AFRO SAMURAI

Slicing action with a twist. For *Afro*, it's a battle to be the best and to avenge his pop's death. Voices by Sam Jackson and a score by Wu-Tang's RZA give it a decided blaxploitation feel.

ACTION

10,000 BC (M)

■ **STARRING:** Steven Strait, Camilla Belle, Cliff Curtis and Omar Sharif
■ **CREATOR:** Roland Emmerich



Director Roland Emmerich has had a pretty decent track record, with the exception of *Godzilla*, which was a steaming pile of monkey crap. He's nailed the big budget special effects-driven bonanzas and always manages to turn out a decent popcorn movie. Led by a cast of virtual unknowns, it tells the story of a young hunter who's forced to pursue a band of warlords who have kidnapped his sweetheart. The prehistoric backdrop gives this a unique look and the narration by Omar Sharif adds a touch of class. Well worth a watch (or even a purchase) for fans of Emmerich, and those that can't get enough of that prehistoric goodness – plus it's got big hairy mammoths. Awesome!

■ **VERDICT:** Turn your brain off and go along for the ride.

★★★

HORROR

L: CHANGE THE WORLD (MA15+)

■ **STARRING:** Shunji Fujimura, Mayuko Fukuda and Kenichi Matsuyama
■ **CREATOR:** Hideo Nakata



Before you all go, "what the hell is this?", let us explain, or better yet, let's just call it *Death Note Spin-Off Movie*. Taking place outside the *Death Note* manga and other films, this is a more intimate look at Detective L's journey. On perhaps his most difficult case, L travels around the world to try and stop a group of renegade scientists from unleashing a deadly virus that could end all life as we know it. The plot feels like an unwelcome departure from the tense, cat and mouse genius of the original *Death Note* and, as such, suffers in direct comparison to said original. That being said, it's not unwatchable – just a significant drop in quality...

■ **VERDICT:** Nowhere near as deep or trippy as the anime.

★★★

HORROR

ONE MISSED CALL (M)

■ **STARRING:** Shannyn Sossamon, Edward Burns, Ana Claudia Talancón, Ray Wise and Azuka Skye
■ **CREATOR:** Eric Valette



The Japanese horror remake train just keeps on a-comin'. The premise asks "what would you do if you got a text message telling you exactly when and where you're going to die?" As you'd expect, there's the prerequisite babes getting axed. Meagan Good certainly fits the bill, as does Shannyn Sossamon (damn, she's fine!) playing lead Elizabeth, but this still kinda feels like a cheap rip of *The Ring*. Edward Burns adds some weight to the mix as Detective Jack Andrews, the only cop who believes Liz. However, it just seems to lack the creative, batshit insane gory edge of the Takashi Miike original. Check that out instead.

■ **VERDICT:** Just another reason having voicemail is sooo important.

★★★

THE SHINING (MA15+)

■ **DIRECTOR:** Stanley Kubrick
■ **STARRING:** Jack Nicholson



Nearly 30 years on and this still scares the shit out of us! An evil presence takes control of a writer, and he proceeds to wreak havoc.

■ **VERDICT:** Big Bad Jack at his scintillating best.

★★★★★

A CLOCKWORK ORANGE (R18+)

■ **DIRECTOR:** Stanley Kubrick
■ **STARRING:** Malcolm McDowell



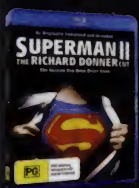
In a bleak vision of future Britain, youth gangs terrorise the city. Facing a long prison sentence, deviant Alex DeLarge opts for a treatment to suppress his violent tendencies.

■ **VERDICT:** This will always stand the test of time. McDowell is mesmerising.

★★★★★

SUPERMAN II (PG)

■ **DIRECTOR:** Richard Lester and Richard Donner
■ **STARRING:** Christopher Reeve, Margot Kidder and Terence Stamp



When three Kryptonians appear on Earth (one sexy, one ruthless and one mungo) it's up to the big blue boy scout to kick their arses back to the Phantom Zone, and save us all.

■ **VERDICT:** Gave us the best line ever... "Son of Jor-El, kneel before Zod!"

★★★★★

BLOOD DIAMOND (MA15+)

■ **DIRECTOR:** Edward Zwick
■ **STARRING:** Leonardo DiCaprio and Jennifer Connelly



Leo de-kaffir-nates Sierra Leone as jack-of-all-trades smuggler Danny Archer. His path intertwines with journalist Maddy Bowen and fisherman Solomon Vandy as they try to save Solomon's family.

■ **VERDICT:** Say what you want, DiCaprio's one of the best on the planet.

★★★★★

ACTION

STREET KINGS (MA15+)

■ **STARRING:** Keanu Reeves, Forest Whitaker, Hugh Laurie, Chris Evans and Jay Mohr
■ **DIRECTOR:** David Ayer



Keanu "whoa" Reeves plays an absolute walking cliché as a veteran detective who is driven to drink by the loss of his wife. Always open to bending the rules a little to "get the job done", he doles out his own brand of justice under the watchful gaze of his captain, played by Forest Whitaker, and his crew of corrupt cops. When Internal Affairs comes sniffing about it all starts to unravel big time, as they turn on each other to protect their arses. Keep an eye out for some decent bit parts by Cedric the Entertainer and rappers Common and The Game. Fans of *Dirty Harry* rip-offs will love it.

■ **VERDICT:** Predictable, yet entertaining at the same time. Comes off as *Training Day*-lite.

★★★

COMEDY

SUPERHERO MOVIE (M)

■ **STARRING:** Drake Bell, Sara Paxton, Christopher McDonald, Leslie Nielsen and Kevin Hart
■ **DIRECTOR:** Craig Mazin



So here we are again. The procession of (alleged) piss-taking continues which started admirably with *Scary Movie*, and has gone drastically downhill ever since. Teen loser Rick Riker develops mutant abilities when bitten by a dragonfly. The trailer looked kinda promising when we first laid our beady eyes on it, but the terrible acting and atrocious lines barely got a smirk out of us. Even the comedic genius of Leslie Nielsen, the bang-on timing of Kevin Hart and the always-stellar Shooter McGavin couldn't get this shocker over the line. Avoid unless hideously drunk...

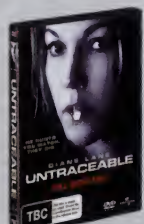
■ **VERDICT:** Only gets the second star for Christopher McDonald's contribution. Otherwise: avoid.

★★★

THRILLER

UNTRACEABLE (MA15+)

■ **STARRING:** Diane Lane, Billy Burke and Colin Hanks
■ **DIRECTOR:** Greg Hoblit



Lane is a secret service agent hot on the trail of a serial killer appealing to the dark and baser instincts of humanity. By logging on to an "untraceable" site, viewers can watch a murder live over the interweb. The more people that log on, the more violent and gruesome the death. This puppy is riding the torture porn wave that has been sweeping through Hollywood since *Saw*. It's a grim look at those who revel in the misfortune of others. It also hops onto the whole 'crazy kids on the Internet' vibe. Yeah, it may sound like it was conceived in a boardroom with some bandwagon hoppers, but it kinda works... kinda.

■ **VERDICT:** Worth a look for the concept alone – and the old, but hot, Diane Lane...

★★★

CULT DIRECTOR OF THE ORIGINAL *ONE MISSED CALL*, TAKASHI MIIKE, IS ONE NOT TO BE MISSED – THE INSANE ULTRAVIOLENCE FEATURED IN MANY OF HIS MOVIES IS LEGENDARY. CHECK OUT *AUDITION* AND *ICHI THE KILLER* FOR EVIDENCE...

BUZZ

The latest movie murmurs from home and abroad



GALE FOR JUSTICE!

Rumours about who will be cast in the *Justice League of America* flick have linked Adam Brody to the Flash,

D.J. Cotrona to Superman, and rapper Common to the role of the Green Lantern. You could actually hear the collective grunts of disbelief when director Glen Miller finally made a decision to turn one of those rumours into fact. That's right boys, Aussie goddess Megan Gale was given the role of Wonder Woman (but seriously, how could anybody look past the gorgeous bronzed babe?) Apparently Miller was blown away by how surprisingly good Gale was (tell us something we don't know).



CASPIAN-TURNED-IMMORTAL

After leaving hundreds of women swooning as the curtains closed on *Narnia*, Prince Caspian

(Ben Barnes) has discovered something about himself; that he is really, really good looking. At least, that's what happens to his character Dorian Gray in his latest movie. The hedonistic Gray makes a pact with the devil so he can stay forever young (meanwhile, his portrait has more wrinkles than a sultana). This classic tale also has Colin Firth on board as the corrupting aristocrat, Lord Henry Wootton. We wonder if the homoerotic tones in the novel will materialise on screen.



WHEN HOLLYWOOD MET SAM

It's always good for Aussie pride when a big Hollywood film stars one of our own. It's even better

when the big Hollywood film is accompanied by a big Hollywood director. Take James Cameron for example. You know – James Cameron... famous director, had his hand in classic movies such as *The Terminator*, *Aliens*, *Dark Angel* (and that crazy Jesus documentary). Now put him with the likes of Sam Worthington, relatively unknown, but Cameron must've taken a shine to him because Sammy's set to star in two of his films due out in 2009. Although *Avatar* and the next instalment of *The Terminator* will undoubtedly have a fair amount of CGI and VFX, we're pretty sure that Australia's Sam Worthington will have a decent amount of screen time.



■ "Hey, can any of you kids do a bow tie?"

CINEMA

STEP BROTHERS (PG)

■ **DIRECTOR:** Adam McKay

■ **STARRING:** Will Ferrell, John C. Reilly and Mary Steenburgen

Who here, by a show of hands, likes Will Ferrell? Chances are that if you like Ferrell, you'd also be a fan of John C. Reilly (you know, that guy that did *The Dewey Cox Story*, that balding fat guy). Both combine to great effect in *Step Brothers*. Ferrell plays Brennan, who still lives comfortably with his mother after 39 years. Now meet Dale (Reilly), a 40-year-old also living at home with his father. Neither are employed, neither have ever left home, and neither have any plans to do anything about it. What happens when their mum and dad decide to get hitched? That's right – they share a room, they get into fights, they're constantly bickering and being typical American brats. Luckily for Brennan and Dale's parents, this hatred is short-lived after discovering that they're perfect best friends. Mr. Dad, however, decides that enough is enough; it's time for the boys to grow up and he gives them the ultimatum: get a job or get out.



COMING SOON

WALL*E

■ **Starring:** Ben Burt

A lovable robot is given the sole task of cleaning planet Earth. WALL*E's all on his lonesome until another robot (EVE) drops in. The two fall in love, only to be torn apart by mankind, who are now looking to return to Earth after a hefty 700-year hiatus.

BRIDESHEAD REVISITED

■ **Starring:** Matthew Goode

Captain Charles Ryder is stationed in the breathtaking estate that is Brideshead during World War II. Upon befriending the mistress, the son, and falling for the beautiful daughter, Ryder finds himself being entrapped in intrigue and secrecy.

MAX PAYNE

■ **Starring:** Mark Wahlberg

Mark Wahlberg takes the lead as a cop bent on revenge. This adaptation combines the plots of both the first and second games in the series. Oh and they've got Ludacris cast as Jim Bravora. Wise casting choice? Hmm. Regardless, we're keen to see how this turns out – could we be looking at the first semi-decent videogame adaptation?

APPLE OF YOUR EYES

Your peepers won't know what hit them when they view the futuristic cyborg mayhem in *Appleseed Ex Machina*. This two-disc DVD release follows the exploits of Deunan and Briareos, members of the elite ESWAT forces, who defend Olympus from rioting citizens and terrorist attacks. With over three hours of extra DVD features, including commentaries and four amazing featurettes, it's guaranteed to keep all you hardcore anime fans happy.



COMPETITION

To be one of 10 lucky people to score this action-packed DVD just answer the below question online.

Tell us, in 25 words or less, who your favourite anime character is and why?

Enter online at www.gameplayer.com.au/competitions using the code: APPLE



MADMAN
ENTERTAINMENT



Codes, hints, tips, unlockables and more!

TIPS & CHEATS

SOULCALIBUR IV

You know you've got soul



■ **Look.** We enjoy skimpy outfits as much as the next man/woman, but really, you have to ask yourself – is this really practical?

You pathetic pieces of Rebel scum! I sense your powers are weak. Bow before Lord Vader, before I Force choke your sorry arses. I hear you're having a few problems with your sword? A bit of a weapons malfunction perhaps? Here are a few hints to get you up and running before you foolishly take on the Dark Lord of the Sith. Maybe I'll just let my apprentice take you out instead.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Now we're not trying to be offensive here, but you ain't gonna get far by button mashing, especially on the harder settings. Why not invest a little into your character? Once you've picked out your favourites, or

created your own, spend a little time in the training mode and get accustomed to the ins and outs of your character. Why attack with several moves you *kinda* know, when you can whoop arse with dozens of well earned attacks at your disposal?

BLOCKING BITCHES

There's always at least one in every group. You know what we're talking about... the little bitch that just blocks their way through each round, counter-attacking and basically taking the fun outta the night. Well no more! With the new armour and critical hits system, if some snapper-head wants to keep blocking, hammer the point home until their armour shatters, leaving them primed for a critical strike. Then lay

them out with a finishing blow. You can also manoeuvre them into the perfect position for a 'grab' by repeatedly striking and keeping them on the defensive. That's what you get for blocking too much ya pansy! Hey – no guts, no glory.

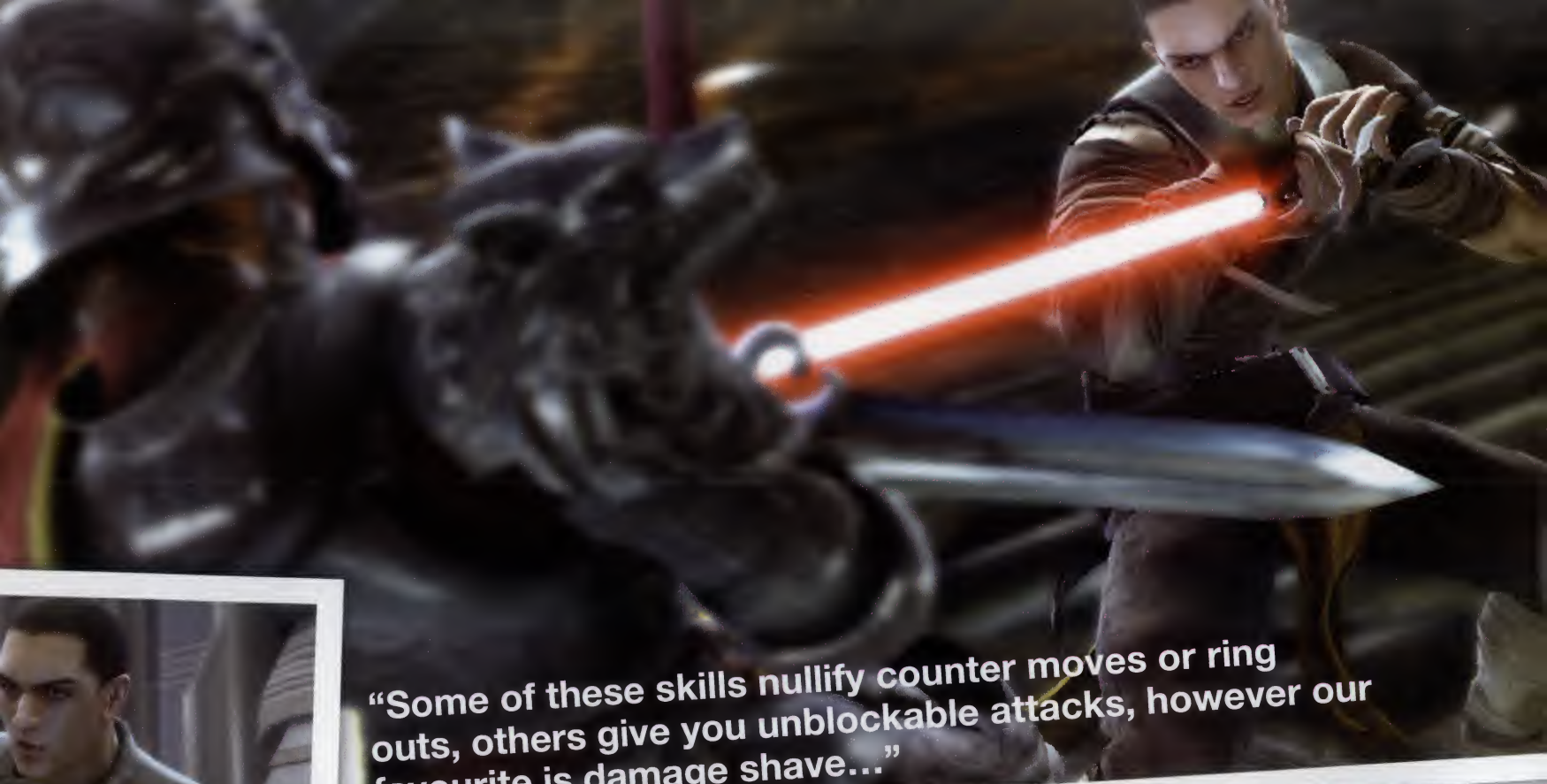
AND WHILE WE'RE ON THE SUBJECT...

Just to clarify, we're not saying never block, that's just insanity, but by spending the entire round in a defensive position you lose your armour and leave yourself open to one-hit kills. By tapping down on the D-pad you'll do a little sidestepping dodge and, more often than not, be in the perfect position to deliver a punishing counter blow. Don't let up once you've got

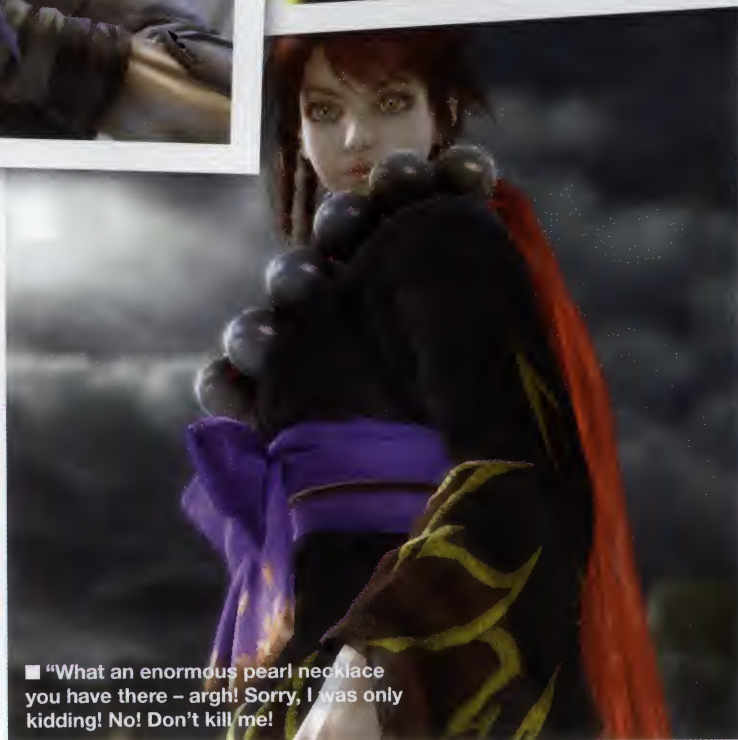
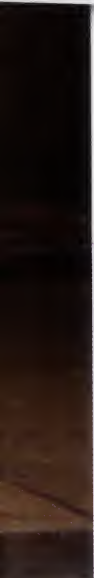
your enemy on the ropes either – we've found the best defence is a strong offence. Keep hammering away – when you start each round, come out guns blazing (so to speak). You can deal a significant amount of damage in a short period of time if you vary your attacks, and don't give your opponent any breathing room.

MORE BOUNCE TO THE OUNCE

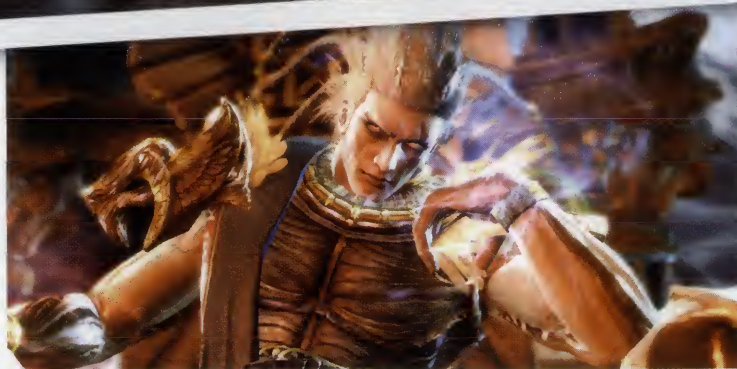
You may call us crass, or even a little puerile, but this technique definitely has some effect. Whether gearing up for a versus match with your mates, or laying the smacketh down online with your created character... hmm... how do we put this delicately? Make your character



"Some of these skills nullify counter moves or ring outs, others give you unblockable attacks, however our favourite is damage shave..."



■ "What an enormous pearl necklace you have there – argh! Sorry, I was only kidding! No! Don't kill me!"



the sexiest little demon your depraved mind can muster up. We're talking cleavage, skimpy clothing and, *ahem*, the correct *Tomb Raider*-esque proportions. This has a two-fold purpose. First off, she's sex on legs to look at, and secondly, she may distract your opponent for a split second with her heaving bosom, ample cleavage or upskirt shot, leaving them open for an underhanded assault.

GOT SKILLZ?

As you progress through stages on and offline, if you stick with the same character you're gonna unlock a whole mess of goodies. Some of these will be increased attributes like power, health and the like. It's well worth taking the time to explore

the skill sets of each to find the best fit for your good self.

Some of these skills nullify counter moves or ring outs, others give you unblockable attacks, however our favourite is 'damage shave', which gives you a small increment of health back with each attack, and 'charged start', where all your attributes are juiced up at the start of each match for a short amount of time.

PIMP OUT YO' CHARACTER

We mentioned above that you can customise your character's attributes. Well the buck doesn't stop there! You also get gold after each round. You can use this to firstly, unlock new players and,

more importantly, buy yourself new more powerful weapons and spiffy new gear. By modifying your clothing you can create a significant difference in your attacking and defensive capabilities.

VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE

When tackling the Tower of Lost Souls, you often get to pick several back-up characters to assist you on your ascent or descent. We know you've all got your favourites, but don't be so hasty to choose similar types of fighters.

If you favour quick attacks, then get yourself a big bruiser into the mix. This'll help you by (a) getting you past a opponent that has cleaned your clock

several times, and (b) allows you to become accustomed to differing styles, thus making you a better player (to this end, we highly recommend choosing 'random' when you play with your mates, it accomplishes the same thing, and no one can bitch about that annoying someone dominating the night by choosing 'difficult to beat' characters).

USE THE SCHWARTZ

Sure it's a little (read: a lot) gimmicky, but every once in a while it's sweet to unleash a little Force magic when playing as Vader or the apprentice – at the very least, you'll momentarily stun your adversary with your wicked cool powers and set them up for a beat down.

DATABASE

All the games that matter on PS3!

FUTURE WATCH

The PS3 games to grab in the coming months

FLOWER

Release: 2009

OK, we admit it. We have no idea what this thing from the *flOw* guys is about, as trailers have looked like everything from tampon ads to Sonic the 'Petal' joining his kin to worship at the foot of the great god Windmill. Still, it looks like a bit of chilled alterna-tainment.

F1

Release: 2009

After SCE's so-so attempt with *F1CE*, racing geeks have been partying, as only they can, over the announcement that Codies have snagged the official licence for a game based on the 2009 F1 season, especially after the official word that, unlike *DiRT* and *GRID*, it will be a sim with separate arcade options.

I AM ALIVE

Release: Early 2009

Being alive has a few advantages over the alternative, so if you've ever wondered what it would be like to survive a large scale tragedy without having to deal with all that kill-innocent-Grandmother-for-water and dirty clothes kind of stuff for real, then Ubisoft's post-Chicago-go-BOOM-now puzzle/adventure may be just the ticket.

THE LAST GUY

Release: Late 2008

Somebody had to see the gaming potential in the whole Google maps thing; add a caped superhero, giant monsters and 'insectibugs' attacking the Tokyo streets, and a mission to save all those not zombieified by a strange purple ray and this top-down, Pied Piper inspired PSN game, currently being fattened-up by SCEJ, has us a lustin'. Could be another PSN success story.

PS3 TOP 20

1



METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

Arguably the best PS3 game to date – an undisputed masterpiece. A legendary game with a legendary hero.

2



GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

The scope and scale of *GTA IV* is beyond anything gaming has ever had to offer. No game has come close to creating a world anything like Liberty City.

3



ASSASSIN'S CREED

A landmark in gaming history. Nothing short of awe-inspiring. The missions are samey, but navigating open worlds will never be the same. The biggest leap since *GTAVIII*.

4



UNCHARTED: DRAKE'S FORTUNE

The best PlayStation exclusive on the market and the best looking console game to date. Frankly, *Uncharted* rocks up to the party and just plain owns everything...

5



CALL OF DUTY 4

Relentlessly exciting. Includes a dizzying variety of combat scenarios and stacks of bleeding-edge military hardware. You'd have to be insane, or a girly-man, to miss it.

6



ROCK BAND

The best party game ever and a triumph in every department, with a killer set list and rad instruments. You wanted the best; you got the best – *Rock Band* rocks.

7



MOTORSTORM

Fast, hard, dirty and utterly exhilarating, *MotorStorm* is essential for everyone's PS3. Not even the lack of split-screen can detract from this fantastic racer.

8



RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN

The perfect launch title for PS3, and possibly the best console FPS ever made. The massive 40-player online deathmatches are more fun than you can imagine.

9



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

One of the deepest adventures we've ever laid eyes on. Simply put – awesome. This is arguably the only RPG you'll need for some time to come.

10



SKATE

A groundbreaking title that resets the bar for sports games in general. It kickflips *Tony Hawk's* to the kerb with its simple approach. Irresistibly addictive and downright essential.

11



WARHAWK

There is no better multiplayer game on PS3 right now. Tighter than a bull's arse on fight night and smoother than a glass of Guinness, it's a superior piece of software.

12



BURNOUT PARADISE

Despite the lack of the old *Crash Mode*, the overwhelming majority of *Burnout Paradise* rocks harder than Slash during an epic guitar solo. So fast, so wild.

13



HEAVENLY SWORD

Heavenly Sword is one of the best games we've seen in ages. A beautiful, yet deep, masterpiece and an awesomely enjoyable ride, albeit a rather short one.

14



GUITAR HERO III

Captures everything perfect about *Guitar Hero* with the best track list yet, but very nearly spoiled it all with the ridiculous new Battle Mode.

15



COLIN MCRAE DIRT

Colin McRae DIRT is an ambitious, accessible racer with a surprising amount of depth. The best rally sim ever? You better believe it. Rest in peace, big guy.

16



THE DARKNESS

Tentacles and guns – the perfect combination! Stunning, original and gory as hell. You'd have to be dim to miss *The Darkness*.

17



STUNTMAN: IGNITION

The vehicular equivalent of a 10-hour-long orgasm. Gentlemen, start your boners. *Stuntman: Ignition* succeeds in upending the original in every way.

18



RATCHET & CLANK FUTURE: TOOLS OF DESTRUCTION

The biggest, wildest, most interesting, varied and downright good ol' fashioned fun adventure these two have been part of.

19



THE ORANGE BOX

A stellar package; ripe, in season and packed full of vitamin value. If there isn't one title here that does it for you your gaming license is null and void.

20



RACE DRIVER: GRID

No V8s and no Australian tracks and it still rates up there with the best of 'em for the suped up cars, intensity and speeeeee! A very pretty package!

PS3

ARMORED CORE 4	7
A far better alternative to <i>Mobile Suit Gundam</i> .	
BEOWULF	6
Has the dubious honour of ticking every game cliché.	
BLADESTORM: THE HUNDRED YEARS' WAR	6
A solid mix of genres wrapped in an intriguing tale.	
BLAZING ANGELS II: SECRET MISSIONS OF WWII	6
Not quite the ace of aces at this stage.	
CALL OF DUTY 3	7
A solid but surprisingly unspectacular shooter.	
CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO	6
Sick and twisted but not enough variety.	
THE CLUB	8
Compulsive and fun – one club you should join.	
CONAN	7
A bulldog of bloodletting, savage adventure and boobies.	
DEVIL MAY CRY 4	7
A worthy entry into the series but the backtracking spoils it.	
DEF JAM: ICON	8
Somehow it's won its way into our hearts. Stupid fun.	
THE EYE OF JUDGEMENT	5
Impressive tech, but it's still a \$160 card game.	
F.E.A.R.	8
A chilling ride but the graphics are a bit of a shocker.	
FIFA 08	8
Finally puts <i>FIFA</i> on level terms with <i>Pro Evolution</i> .	
FIFA STREET 3	7
The saviour for your multiplayer soul. Simple but fun.	
FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3	8
Boasts visuals that will knock the teeth out of you.	
FOLKLORE	8
Great graphics, memorable characters. A sweet surprise.	
FULL AUTO 2: BATTLELINES	7
Brims with potential but fails to live up to it.	
GENJI: DAYS OF THE BLADE	5
Plodding gameplay that belongs on the Atari 2600.	
THE GODFATHER: THE DON'S EDITION	6
Fine, but do yourself a favour and get the PS2 version.	
THE GOLDEN COMPASS	4
Uninspired level design and dull quests make this a chore.	
HARRY POTTER & THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX	6
Decent, but its chore-like structure will bore most.	
JUICED 2: HOT IMPORT NIGHTS	7
A top bit of racing fluff, although it's all a tad generic.	
KANE & LYNCH: DEAD MEN	6
One part <i>Hitman</i> , one part Michael Mann; mostly a let down.	
LAIR	5
A massive let-down. It feels rushed and unfinished.	
LOST PLANET: EXTREME CONDITION	6
Solid enough, but a lazy port and a visual let-down.	

5 MOVIE TIE-INS THAT DIDN'T SMELL LIKE CRAP...



Die Hard Trilogy (PSone)

You're John McClane... and if that statement isn't cool enough just like that, multiply it by three! Yippee-ki-ay!



The Italian Job (PSone)

Based on the original film, this chance, courtesy of Rockstar, to go Michael Caine on everybody's arses rocked.



Scarface – The World is Yours (PS2)

This opportunity to introduce wannabe assassins to our little friends was ace, GTA similarity or not.



Star Wars: Starfighter (PS2)

Hop into various fighters and unleash photon death on Naboo's invaders (ooh, *Mighty Boosh* crossover, anyone?).



The Warriors

Rockstar, is there anything they can't do? They took this flick, gave it the rumble treatment, and we couldn't wait to come and play-ee-ay.

MADDEN NFL 08	7
Some great improvements and plenty of modes.	
MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE	9
Great co-op and an exhaustive list of Marvel's greatest.	
MEDAL OF HONOR AIRBORNE	6
A dinosaur of an FPS – wait for <i>Brothers in Arms</i> instead.	
MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM: TARGET IN SIGHT	3
A rubber godzilla of a title. What a pipe blocker!	
MX VS. ATV UNTAMED	6
Feels like a PS2 port, looks like a PS2 port. Disappointing.	
NBA 08	5
Fails to pick a side (sim or arcade) and so fails at both.	
NBA 2K8	8
Not as pretty as <i>LIVE</i> but has more depth.	
NBA LIVE 08	8
Best of its kind. B-ball devotees will adore it, guaranteed.	
NBA STREET HOMECOURT	8
The brashest, most addictive arcade basketball game yet.	
NEED FOR SPEED CARBON	8
The last <i>NFS</i> street racer before the series went legit.	
NEED FOR SPEED PROSTREET	8
Great smoke, but more depth would've been nice.	
NINJA GAIDEN SIGMA	8
A treasure trove of gaming goodness, super tough.	
PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: AT WORLD'S END	6
A very shallow slash 'em up. Ye be warned.	
PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2008	8
Still the best soccer in the biz, but the graphics are dire.	
SEGA SUPERSTAR TENNIS	5
Enough with Sonic trying to best Mario.	
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG	4
Mostly terrible. Avoid at all costs.	
STRANGLEHOLD	7
<i>Max Payne</i> inspired action, plenty of frantic fun.	
TIME CRISIS 4	7
Bi-polar, so stick to the arcade mode.	
TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON: AW2	8
A tense, realistic shooter, but <i>Rainbow Six Vegas</i> is better.	
TONY HAWK'S PROVING GROUND	6
Struggles to escape the shadow of <i>SKATE</i> .	
TUROC	7
Packs plenty of bite but it's missing a few teeth.	
UNREAL TOURNAMENT 3	8
Gorgeous and gory, but the lack of split-screen blows.	
UEFA EURO 2008	8
A possible contender for football game of the year.	
VIRTUA TENNIS 3	8
Some of the best fun four people can have on one PS3.	
WWE SMACKDOWN VS. RAW 2008	7
A solid entry. A few new additions but still plays the same.	

MAGIC MOMENTS

Great moments in PlayStation history remembered!



THE GAME: SingStar Vol. 2

THE CONSOLE: PS3

THE YEAR: 2008

THE MOMENT: Sometimes, seemingly innocuous events can have a seismic impact on somebody. Like having a partner piss themselves laughing at your attempts to sing one day, and never failing to remind you of your suckiness any time you open your mouth thereafter. Rather than telling them ever-so-politely to go and get stuffed – that came a little later – one of us was so scarred for life that they vowed never to sing in public again (in the car, doesn't count). So, despite the regular lure of Sony's great party starter *SingStar* and the loosening-up effects of whatever social lubrications had been ingested, no amount of prodding, pleading, cajolery or outright bribery could ever prompt this person to go anywhere near one of those natty red or blue banded mics. But, then along came the latest instalment in the stalwart series... and things actually changed.

The key that prompted dealing with scars deeper than those on the arms of the emo-est of emo kids was an almost unhealthy obsession with 'Britpop'. First up, this person's all-time favourite single ever, Pulp's 'Common People', was there. Mmmm... Jarvis Cocker! However, the clincher to ending 15 years of public vocal chord silence was the Radiohead track 'Street Spirit'. Long the fave sing-along-in-the-car-as-long-as-nobody-else-was-in-it track, in fact ever since Thom and co's *The Bends* album came out, the chance to possibly stick it up the aforementioned ex – wherever the hell they may be (in fact, hell would be nice) – finally usurped the terror of any potential embarrassment. Besides, it was amongst mates, good mates – the kind who don't rag on you 'for serious'. Long story short, the very first attempt saw a ranking of 'SingStar'. It may have been on easy, but like we care. [Adopts infomercial testimony voice] Thank you *SingStar*!

Taking a look back at the best in the business...

RETROSPECTIVE

1991 1992 1993 1994 1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 2025

MAN IS STILL THE WARMEST PLACE TO HIDE

Having a nostalgic gander at *The Thing*

In 1982 a talented writer/composer/director named John Carpenter made his first big budget 'studio film', *The Thing*. Based on the novella *Who Goes There?* by J.W. Campbell – see boxout – it was dark, nihilistic, scary and brilliant.

Its genius seemed to be lost on the sponge-brained monkey-tards of the era as most were still basking in the afterglow of Spielberg's cutesy alien romp, *E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial*.

Cut to 2002 and Computer Artworks bung out a multi-platform game called *The Thing* – a videogame sequel to Carpenter's visionary original. By now *The Thing* has garnered a significant following both on video and DVD.

LET'S DO THAT THING AGAIN

The game starts off where the movie ended – a research station in Antarctica – but months after the events of the movie.

You are the Captain of a rescue team,

although the ruined bases you encounter don't give much hope of survivors.

Not human ones anyway.

The game is essentially a third-person survival horror with a few unique wrinkles. For a start, you always have to find warmth. The harsh Antarctic weather will kill you in minutes, so there's always a feeling of being on the run, forever searching for the next warm place.

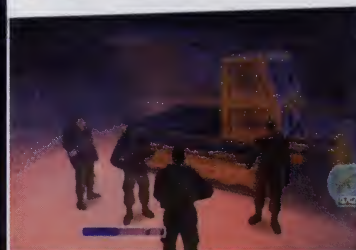
Add to that the burden of having to get men to help you fix fuse boxes or give you medical aid – which is helpful – but they're a skittish lot. Once they realise *The Thing* can be *anyone*, they will react in paranoid and illogical ways. Ways that are distinctly, and recognisably, human.

If they see too many bodies, or are confronted with too many monsters, they might up and blow their own heads off. Worse is, if you think they're *The Thing*, you burn them and it turns out they were human all along. That's a sure way to have your men revolt and kill you. Or turn into *The Thing* and absorb and replicate you. Your men have a trust/paranoia meter.

THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD



John Carpenter's *The Thing* is actually a remake. Sorta. See, in the 1950s they had a bash at adapting the novella. Problem was, back in the 50s they didn't have Rob Bottin and Stan Winston – the special effects legends who created *The Thing*'s unforgettable transformations. So they went with a Frankenstein's Monster-looking dude who is really a vegetable. An intelligent vegetable. Um, yeah – don't look at us, we didn't make it!



Give them a gun? Trust starts to go up. Burn a wee Thing crawly monster? Trust goes up. Burn their mate to a crisp? Trust goes exponentially down.

But that's the catch – theoretically *The Thing* could be anyone at anytime. It doesn't quite pay off, admittedly. The whole game's just a wee bit more linear than it should be – however, some spectacular, grotesque monsters, genuinely cool puzzle solving elements and some brutal and scary moments make this an underrated masterpiece, much like the film it's based upon.

WATCH THE SKIES, KEEP LOOKING

The Thing owns so much 'ass', it should be Big Bob's Ridiculously Huge Warehouse of Donkeys (geddit, 'ass' as in donkey? Oh screw you pun-hating mongrels!) yet it never spawned a sequel. However from the looks of games like *Dead Space* people will keep being inspired by the movie and the game. In the meantime, you could probably pick up a second-hand copy for five bucks – and rejoice in the paranoid, existential horror. Hooray!

— Anthony O'Connor

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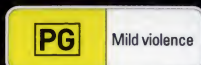
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